

Sight & Sound

The Film Monthly

March

1/6



**"OUR TOWN" — A Correspondence Between
THORNTON WILDER and SOL LESSER**

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Sight & Sound

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CONTENTS

TWO ON LOCATION	426
<i>The Front Page—</i>	428
THE PROTECTED INDUSTRY (4) Duncan Crow	429
IN PERSPECTIVE Penelope Houston	431
"OUR TOWN" Thornton Wilder & Sol Lesser	433
<i>Films of the Month—</i>	
STORM WARNING, MANEGES, OUR VERY OWN, BORN YESTERDAY	439
SCRIPTING Penelope Houston	442
ACTING Philip Hope-Wallace	443
A LINE OF EXPERIMENT Gavin Lambert	444
U.S.A. v. HOLLYWOOD (2) Ernest Borneman	448
FILM GUIDE	451
THE OTHER CINEMA	
(1) JAPAN Joseph L. Anderson	452
TELEVISION Ernest Lindgren	454
CORRESPONDENCE & COMPETITION	455
ON THE COVER: Jennifer Jones and Laurence Olivier in William Wyler's <i>Carrie</i> , from the novel by Theodore Dreiser.	

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TWO ON

American films in the last two or three years have shown a renewed interest in current native problems, and occasionally, with such productions as *The Search* and *The Big Lift*, in European ones. Two directors of note, FRED ZINNEMANN and ANATOLE LITVAK, have recently finished films shot wholly or partially in Europe, the first in Italy, the second in Germany.

Teresa



Fred Zinneman directing John Ericson and Patricia Collinge on location in New York

Fred Zinnemann is a director who has become prominent in the last few years with *The Search*, *Act of Violence* and *The Men*. His latest film will be nearest in style to the first and last of these: *Teresa*, shot entirely on location in Italy and the environs of New York City, is the story of a G.I. who marries an Italian girl and brings her back to his tenement home. His mother's resentment of the girl, and her own difficulties, form the tension of the story that follows.

Teresa was written by Stewart Stern and Alfred Hayes, and produced by Arthur Loew, who worked in the same capacity with Zinnemann on *The Search*. The Italian scenes were shot in and near the village of Scascoli, between Bologna and Florence: its inhabitants had rebuilt Scascoli, a casualty of the war, by the time the film unit arrived, and had to be persuaded to reconvert it to ruins—for which, of course, they were compensated. Most of the supporting players were chosen from non-professionals on the spot: the G.I. is played by John Ericson, a 23 year-old television actor making his first film appearance, and the Italian girl by Pier Angeli—formerly Anna Maria Pierangeli, who appeared with de Sica last year in an Italian film directed by Leonide Moguy, *Tomorrow is Too Late*. She is eighteen

years old. Patricia Collinge, whose performances in *The Little Foxes* and *Shadow of a Doubt* will be remembered, plays the mother.

Zinnemann was born forty three years ago in Vienna. He studied music and law before becoming interested in films: Greed and Vidor's *The Big Parade* turned his ambitions to the cinema. In Paris he went to a school for cameramen, and in 1929 arrived in America. His first job there was to play a German soldier in *All Quiet on the Western Front*, after which he became assistant to the emigré director, Berthold Viertel. Later he met Flaherty, and was going to work with him on a picture he planned to make about a little-known tribe in Russia: preparatory work went ahead in Berlin, and then the project fell through after a divergence of views with the Soviet Government. Back in America, Zinnemann directed a film for Paul Strand, *The Wave*, shot on location on the Mexican coast, made short subjects for M.G.M. (one of which, about Dr. Semmelweis, won an Academy Award) and worked his way up in features to *The Seventh Cross*. His last M.G.M. film, *Act of Violence*, completed his contract there, and since that time he has worked independently—for Stanley Kramer on *The Men*, and Arthur Loew on *Teresa* (to be released by M.G.M.).



A Scascoli location: Pier Angeli and John Ericson with children



Pier Angeli and John Ericson

LOCATION

A director who, in his own words, likes "fresh situations and fresh problems"—and fresh faces, for he introduced Montgomery Clift and Marlon Brando on the screen—he is one of the most interesting younger talents now working in America.

JAMES MORGAN.

Decision Before Dawn

Russian-born Anatole Litvak, now 49 years old, has made films in Germany, France and America: his long and varied career has included *Mayerling*, *Coeur de Lilas*, *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, a collaboration with Frank Capra on the "WhyWe Fight" series, a Hollywood remake of *Le Jour se Lève*, *Sorry Wrong Number* and *The Snake Pit*. He has recently finished shooting *Decision Before Dawn*, made on location in Germany and the Geisalgasteig studios at Munich. Based on a much-praised American novel, "Call it Treason", by George Howe, the film is set in Nazi Germany during the regime's last chaotic days, when Allied troops were already fighting in the land Hitler declared would never be invaded. It is the story of "Happy", a corporal in the Medical Corps of the Luftwaffe, who is captured by the Allies and agrees to be sent back as a spy behind the German lines, to investigate the morale of the men and their degree of readiness for surrender.

"Happy" is played by Oskar Werner, a young and talented Austrian film actor, who has appeared at Vienna's famous Burg Theatre; he has just signed a seven-year contract with 20th Century-Fox, the producers of the film. Two American parts are played by Richard Basehart, as an American soldier who befriends "Happy",



Oskar Werner as "Happy": the railway station

and Gary Merrill: the rest of the cast is almost entirely German, and includes several actors well known on the German stage.

Shooting against actual backgrounds, great care has been taken to achieve authenticity in detail, from the provision of 2,000 German military uniforms correct to the last button, to the special printing of Wehrmacht paybooks and manufacture of Gestapo identification tags. A vast store of impedimenta was collected—hundreds of helmets, mess-kits, portraits of Hitler, out-of-date cigarette packets, license plates, road signs, German army rifles and even some of the ancient shotguns and fowling pieces issued by the Nazis to the People's Guard for a last ditch stand. Because Munich railway station has been rebuilt since the war, a new ruined station of rubble and twisted girders had to be constructed.

DENISE RIDOUT.



Litvak, standing behind camera; Franz Planer, cameraman, in cap; Peter Viertel, co-scriptwriter, centre, above camera



Litvak directing a scene on Munich railway station

The Front Page

1951

IN TWO MONTHS' TIME the Festival of Britain will have started: perhaps in retrospect a little like the picnic party in Fragonard's picture in the National Gallery—a boatload of merry-makers drifting downstream past an immense, torrential waterfall—but in prospect a bold undaunted, expression of confidence. Confidence in what?—it may be asked. Not, one hopes, in the sort of future that the last reels of *La Vie Commence Demain* project, in which the only alternative to atomic disaster appears to be an era of mechanical well-being, human problems solved by increased supplies of electricity, wheat and perfected aerial transport. One would like to think of the Festival as presenting, side by side, the arts and sciences; flesh and spirit; the balance of pure imagination and applied imagination that Humphrey Jennings, in his film *Family Portrait* (commissioned for the Festival) diagnosed in the British genius—an occasion, like this film, both retrospective and prophetic.

The cinema's place in this occasion will certainly reflect this balance. There have been complaints that the commissioned films are too few, that the emphasis will be too much on the Telecinema, with its display of experiments in stereoscopy; but two things must be remembered. A piece of music or a poem can be commissioned for a fraction of the sum it takes to produce a documentary, let alone a feature film—and, arising from this, the British cinema cannot expect to be represented solely by films produced directly for the Festival. 1951 has begun well, with more of our leading directors at work than was the case last year. In various stages of preparation, shooting or finishing up are Carol Reed's *Outcast of the Islands*, Thorold Dickinson's *Secret People*, Robert Hamer's *His Excellency*, Alexander Mackendrick's *Man in the White Suit*, Anthony Asquith's *The Browning Version*, and of course the John Boulting-Eric Ambler-Ronald Neame Festival production, *The Magic Box*. In the documentary field, Basil Wright returns with his film on the Port of London, the film section of the British Transport Commission is engaged on what promises to be a fascinating account of the history of transport in this country—a documented step back into the past, compiled from records in the National Gallery and elsewhere—and Paul Dickson (who made the *Undefeated*) has written and directed *David*, which through the span of one man's life evokes the mood and traditions of life in a Welsh community. *David*, like Jennings' film, was commissioned for the Festival.

All this is 1951—and, as current production will be represented by these and other films, the past will be reviewed in a special repertory season of British films from the early 30's to the present day, at a West End cinema (June 4th-17th). Two dozen films will be shown, and their creators, actors and technicians, it is hoped, will introduce them.

Outside London there will of course be the Edinburgh Festival (last week of August, first of September): additional activities will include an International Festival of Amateur Films at Glasgow (held last year at Cannes, and now for the first time in Britain), and at Cambridge in July two important associations will meet—the International Federation of Film Archives, and the International Association of Film Clubs and Academies, established last year at Venice under de Sica and Clair.

The future will be signalled most dramatically at the Telecinema, where stereoscopic films (with stereophonic sound) will be shown. News of the third dimension on the screen has hitherto been brought back only by a few who witnessed it in Moscow: now it becomes a reality here, and a fascinating one in the hands of Norman MacLaren, whose stereoscopic film in colour (with a special score by Lou Applebaum) will be seen during the summer. The tests so far viewed—both in black and white, and colour—show the remarkable decorative possibilities of patterns composed and extended in several depths. As well as this, the Festival will present a stereoscopic film in Technicolor and big screen television programmes. Altogether the Telecinema will reflect an admirable balance between art and science: for we shall see not only the mechanical possibilities of a new adjunct to the medium, but also an artist experimenting with it.

SIGHT AND SOUND will produce in April a special Festival publication, to be called "Films in 1951". The largest proportion of its 100 pages will be devoted to the British cinema, current and retrospective. In general articles and in profiles of leading personalities it will assess the development of the cinema in this country; it will contain surveys in print and pictures of films showing in Britain for the next months (British, American, French, Italian and others), contributions from critics, film-makers, actors, and a full introduction to the structure and the personalities of the British cinema.

LITERATURE, as distinct from the reportage which is sometimes nearly literature, is seldom in perfect step with actuality. The didactic writer—an Ibsen or a Shaw—has to create his own intellectual climate; the interpretative writer—a Joyce or a Virginia Woolf—employs a perspective which has little to do with the contemporary scene. Literary fashions change slowly, and the giants cast long shadows over the ways of thought of succeeding generations. But in the cinema all is change. With no traditions, no solid body of academic criticism to act as a balancing factor, styles, theories, techniques are constantly shifting. In a decade a national cinema may rise and decline; a technical innovation be explored, over-worked and out-dated. It is all a part of the cinema's constant and necessary preoccupation with the immediate present.

That this preoccupation is necessary, there can be little doubt. A national cinema which drew its inspiration entirely from literature and from the past would be a dying cinema. It might die slowly, since it would be death by suffocation, but die it undoubtedly would. Films, indeed, are certain to reflect the pressures put upon a people, the crises to which they react: national vitality, fear, uncertainty, will be pictured there more immediately and perhaps more clearly than in any other art.

The stimulus comes from without, and the cinema reacts. This has implications which some people may prefer to avoid, since it suggests that the temper and quality of a national cinema (not necessarily the work of the authentic artist, of whom there can seldom be more than two or three in each country and in each generation) is determined by something quite outside the control of the cinema itself. But, if one looks at the history of the cinema, short as it is, it seems to fall into a pattern which admits no other conclusion.

This was not at once apparent. The first war certainly did not provide any very notable impetus, and perhaps the finest war film, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, made in 1930, was, significantly, literary in origin. The authentic and unmistakable reflection of national vitality came with the Russian films of the first Five Year Plan. These may be roughly divided into two categories: films which explained, justified and narrated the progress of revolution (*Battleship Potemkin*, *Mother*, *The End of St. Petersburg*) and those which looked to the future, showing how the new world was to be created (*The General Line*, *Turksib* and, to a lesser extent, *Earth*). Both categories shared the same confident energy, the sense that history was being written while it was being made, and that to write it the film-makers had evolved a new language—a language reasoned, in the case of Eisenstein, as closely as a dialectic argument. The reaction of those who, like the Webbs, returned from a visit to Russia with the exultant conviction that "I have seen the future—and it works!" now seems an intolerably facile surrender to idealism. But to see these Russian films is to be projected back into something of the same state of mind: the stimulus was immense, and so was the reaction to it.

Yet, as early as 1928, the unbiased observer could see, as Paul Rotha did in the first *Film Till Now*, that the ideological driving force had its dangers. Propagandist intentions were already set, the cold bureaucratic hand was tightening its grip, and the first enthusiasm must, by its very nature, be short-lived. The inevitable followed. Individuals continued to produce fine films but (as in the *Gorki* trilogy) often tended to look backwards; others, such as Eisenstein, became steadily more remote from the present. Faith in the power of

the people became, even in films of the second world war, less a passionate and dramatic conviction than the dutiful expression of policy.

For such another national renaissance, the world had to wait until the second world war. Britain, whose studio productions had previously shown only rare signs of individuality, created a new style, uniting documentary observation with fiction, to chronicle reactions to contemporary events. Films such as *In Which We Serve*, *The Way Ahead* and *The Way to the Stars* presented the services; *Millions Like Us* explored the factory; *Waterloo Road* showed civilian life. Film makers were not, as in the case of the Soviets, concerned to educate or explain. They simply took the daily lives of the people—lives of strain, tension, new experiences, heightened awareness to the most every day happenings—and gave them back to them, incidentally revealing more clearly just where the individual stood in the war frame-work. A few exhortations, a few unlikely patriotic speeches (notably in *In Which We Serve*) did little to weaken the first impact. To see these films now, however, is to experience a certain disappointment. Perhaps it was inevitable. We see them now in cold blood, without that emotional audience response which expressed originally the need that they answered. At the same time, they suffer collectively from a superficial observation of characters, as opposed to the exact observation of material surroundings. Only perhaps in one film, *Fires were Started*, did the observation fuse with poetic awareness, and the result is a masterpiece untouched by time: for the rest, straightforward reportage such as *Western Approaches* survives more nearly intact than reportage in the guise of fiction.

For all that, these films have a range, a direction, a sense of responsibility to the audience, which marks the highest point that the British cinema has attained. The reaction followed rapidly. To a certain extent it had its origin in happenings within the industry—over-confidence, resulting disappointment, and the inevitable tendency to play safe. But a part of the explanation can be found, surely, in the post war state of the nation. The mood might be described less as one of strain and crisis, than of apathy and even dejection: it is an atmosphere which the cinema cannot help but reflect. Significantly, most of the best post-war films have come, at one remove, from literature—*Henry V*, *Great Expectations*, *The Fallen Idol*, *Queen of Spades*—and such comic triumphs as *Kind Hearts and Coronets* and *Whisky Galore* belong to fantasy rather than to actuality. The returning soldier, the housing shortage, industrial readjustments, political issues, have had little part in the British cinema during the last five years. It would be difficult to deny that our films have lost contact with actuality, and that they are the poorer for it.

The Italian post-war cinema provides the third instance of instantaneous reaction to national circumstances. Ever since *Open City* was first shown overseas the Italians have led the field. Rossellini's *Open City* and *Paisa*, de Sica's *Sciuscia* and *Bicycle Thieves*, even the somewhat meretricious works of de Santis and Zampa, have been greeted with a delight which inspired the cult of neo-realism, and sent cavalcades from Hollywood and Britain to Italy, as if hopeful to share in the glory. To a world grown tired of Hollywood's almost excessive studio polish, the very roughness of the Italian productions seemed in itself exciting—a virtue created triumphantly out of

a necessity. The two directors most admired in Britain—Rossellini and de Sica—have little in common. Rossellini caught the temper of liberation with unequalled journalistic flair; de Sica, notably in *Bicycle Thieves*, has gone as near as any film-maker in the world to probing the roots of the contemporary problem—the individual's sense of helplessness in the face of political and economic forces. Both created their styles out of the different demands of their material and, as in the case of the Russians and of the British, a revolution in subject material demanded a stylistic revolution.

These films grew out of a particular moment in history. If Italy can continue to make pictures of their quality, she is running counter to the lessons of experience. It does not, however, seem likely. Italian audiences themselves have always preferred Hollywood's more frivolous products to the achievements of their own directors. Another symptom is the very general use of a battery of assorted script-writers: it is hard to believe that the human element can long survive in stories so mechanically produced. With only a small audience in their own country, with pressures and tensions removed, and the liberation a moment in the past, it seems probable that the Italian revival, surviving perhaps in the work of one or two of the more firmly rooted directors, will go the way of the rest.

A cinematic climate of a quite different kind, produced not by liberation but by defeat, was that of Germany in the 1920's. Siegfried Kracauer, in *From Caligari to Hitler*, has traced the rise of Nazism in terms of developments in the cinema. There can be little doubt not only that the German cinema took its tone from the times, but that it was able so to impress the world because the mood it expressed was more clearly defined, more insistent, than anything the victorious nations had to show. The themes, the concentration on insanity summed up in the names of the two doctors, Caligari and Mabuse; the harking back to Wagnerian fantasies; the very technique, laboured, solemn and grandiose: all are expressions of a state of mind dominated by shame and fear, and finding relief only in the glorious past. This temperament made possible the rise of Hitler. When the pressures of defeat were relaxed, German cinema fell under the influence of propaganda, notoriously fatal to realism. It is significant that the post-war German films seem to reflect, whether seriously such as *The Murderers are Among Us*, or comically such as *Berliner Ballade*, little but self-pity and a plea for exculpation. The pressure in this case has not been of the type which creates a reaction: it has been crushing.

Two exceptions, at first sight remarkable, from the general rule of the effects of external pressures on national cinema appear to be France and America. France is a rather special case. It is often claimed that in the pre-war French cinema can be seen all the traces of that defeatism and inner collapse which explain France's fall in 1940. But what, if this argument is true, is the French cinema? Certainly not that of Clair, only to a slight extent that of Duvivier and Renoir (with the exception of the latter's *La Règle du Jeu*, the inspired summing up of a decadent society. The argument appears to be based largely on those films scripted by Prevert, and his assumption that the young, the hopeful and the courageous will always be defeated by the forces of society, summed up in the old and malignant, is a personal rather than a national expression. Since the war, however, French cinema has certainly taken a turn towards greater melancholy. Cocteau, with his pursuit of death, has been one of the most productive and influential directors. Films as varied as *Manon*, *Les Amants de Verone* and *Une si Jolie Petite Plage* are essentially

fatalistic, expressing the futility of all human endeavour. The French, however, as always, fit only with difficulty into generalisations.

Hollywood, though, is a mighty exception to the rule. It is true that national changes in mind and policy are reflected in American films; it is true that the ebbing and flowing of the social conscience is echoed in waves of problem pictures. Beneath these shifts and swerves, however, the industry continues, immutable. Hollywood is less a national cinema in the ordinary sense than a solitary phenomenon. Just as a factory may turn overnight from the production of cars to that of tanks, and return as easily to cars once more, so Hollywood may change styles, techniques and subject matter, without altering its essential trademarks, and without that variation in the standard of proficiency and the depth of emotional response which marks the emergence of a renaissance. Hollywood, it appears, has found in industrial continuity that balancing factor which the more ephemeral national cinemas inevitably lack.

During the last thirty years the European cinema has been dominated in turn by five countries: Germany, Russia, France, Britain and Italy. Hollywood, it should be noted, pays for its continuity by never achieving this kind of artistic recognition. With the possible exception of France, no national cinema has owed its prominence to the existence of a group of acknowledged masters such as—to take an analogy from another art—the French impressionist school of painters. Rather, in every case, the cinema has risen to and gained strength from a particular national situation, a combination of circumstances beyond its control. When the moment passes (unless Italy proves the exception) the men who made the films remain, but only the exceptional few continue to produce works of high quality after the driving force has ebbed away. Literary movements are of longer duration, but a valid comparison is the sudden rise and equally sudden fall of the Elizabethan drama which, as the expression of a period of national self-confidence, enthusiasm and expansion, proved unable to outlast it.

A country's cinema, in other words, is always at its strongest when circumstances press most directly upon it: it finds new energy and new invention in greater realism, greater awareness of the contemporary problem, rather than in the retreat from it. But if this direct reaction is the cinema's greatest source of strength, it also has its dangers. The oscillations, the variations in quality and quantity, the fallings off and revivals of impetus, are enemies of that stability and continuity which make, in any art, for health, and which alone make it possible to establish valid critical standards. It can be argued that this century has seen, in all the arts, the same violent changes, the same efforts at adjustment, the same shifts in focus. But the cinema is alone in having no long established critical yardstick against which the purely contemporary can be measured: in the cinema, everything is contemporary.

Whether the cause is temperament, or economics (the lack of Hollywood's markets and industrial resources) or a combination of the two, the ups and downs of the European cinema have resulted in a lack of balance, an almost feverish impermanence. The solution—and whether it can be achieved only time will show—is continuity without the loss of that responsiveness to the current trend which has always carried the cinema forward. In a century of violent upheavals, of a political equilibrium shattered perhaps beyond repair, the European cinema is likely never to lack for long the stimulus it apparently needs: for the moment, however, it relies too much on the shot in the arm.



Thornton Wilder

"OUR TOWN"— FROM STAGE TO SCREEN

Thornton Wilder
and Sol Lesser



Sol Lesser

Thornton Wilder's "Our Town" combines a very simple theme with adroit and ingenious stage technique. The play is set in Grover's Corners, a small New England town. The first act shows daily life, particularly that of two next-door neighbours, the Gibbs and the Webbs. In the second act George Gibbs, now grown-up, falls in love with and marries Emily Webb. The third act is set in the cemetery, where the dead sit and watch the living, and gradually lose their ties with the earth. Emily, still young, joins them; at first she seeks to rejoin the living and, allowed a day back on earth, chooses her twelfth birthday: with the new awareness she has gained, she is saddened and shocked at the lack of sympathy and understanding between people, and, consoled, returns to the dead. The play was performed on an almost bare stage, with few props. Wilder used a narrator and commentator, the stage-manager; characters step outside the action of the play and address the audience; the narration employs spoken thoughts and flashbacks. In the screen version the plot structure was maintained, with the exception of the ending (discussed in this correspondence); the film, however, employed a naturalistic technique, as better suited to the medium, but endeavoured to maintain Wilder's purpose. This, perhaps, is best summed up in the stage manager's words: "So—people a thousand years from now,—this is the way we were in the provinces North of New York at the beginning of the Twentieth Century—this is the way we were—in our growing up and in our marrying, and in our living, and in our dying."

The following correspondence is reprinted, with the permission of the copyright owners, from Theatre Arts Anthology, edited by Rosamond Gilder and others. (Theatre Arts Books: Robert M. MacGregor, New York, 1950.)

New York,
October 7, 1939

Dear Mr. Lesser,

Forgive my delay in answering these letters and reporting on this material. . . Considering the screenplay pp I-79 (the second instalment is waiting for me in New Haven, and I shall find it there this afternoon):—

I feel that now the point has come in the work, as I foresaw, when my feelings must often give way before those of people who understand motion picture narrative better than I do. It's not a matter of fidelity to my text—since I doubt whether there has ever been a movie as faithful to its original text as this seems to be—it's just a matter of opinion, and my opinion should often give way before that of those who know moving pictures thoroughly.

I. For instance, in the opening. Mr. Morgan appearing at the door of his drugstore, and saying: "Well, folks, we're in Grover's Corners, New Hampshire. . ." seems to me far less persuasive and useful than the opening over the jig-saw puzzle. The puzzle opening has the advantages:

(1) Of setting the background against the whole United States, that constant illusion to larger dimensions of time and space which is one of the principal elements of the play; and

(2) Of giving the actor and the audience that transitional moment between talking-one's-thoughts and addressing-a-theatre-audience from the screen, that Sacha Guitry found necessary, too. It would seem to me that each occasion that Mr. Morgan addresses the audience directly should have some such preparation: from monologue to address.

II. In the episodes during the evening it would seem to me that (pp.38ff) there should be constantly maintained by the

camera the view of the whole town—our feeling that *there* is choir rehearsal; *there* are the children at work; *there* is Dr. Gibbs reading. These episodes are very slight to be received in succession; but all gain when they are given with an air of being simultaneous. At present the camera directions don't pick up the whole town until page 49. . .

III. As to the date.

1919-1923 would be all right with me. It closes out these horse-and-buggy pre-automobile days which may have been a part of the much discussed "nostalgia" which people found in the play. I can't for the life of me think of any events that could substitute for the Treaty of Versailles and the Lindbergh Flight. Death of Grover Cleveland? . . .

In the meantime, all my cordial regards to you and your family and to Frank.

Sincerely ever,
THORNTON

Culver City,
October 11, 1939

Telegram to Thornton Wilder

YOU PERSUADE ME TO RESTORE JIGSAW PUZZLE OPENING.
AM TRYING TO FIND DEVICE TO MAINTAIN FEELING OF
WHOLE TOWN AT NIGHT. . .

SOL LESSER

New Haven, Conn.,
October 9, 1939.

Dear Sol,

Returning to New Haven I found the yellow pages of corrections and now have everything before me.

The cuts in Mrs. Gibbs-Mrs. Webb shelling beans are all right with me; also the transferred speeches from the Stage Manager to Mrs. Gibbs in the last act. Also the omission of the Birthday Scene from the opening sequence.

My only worry is that—realistically done—your wedding scene won't be interesting enough, and that it will reduce many of the surrounding scenes to ordinary-ness.

Did you ever see a wedding scene on stage or screen that followed through normally?

Either it was interrupted (*Smiling Through* and *Jane Eyre* and *It Happened One Night*), or it showed the bride hating the groom (*The Bride the Sun Shines On*), or some other irregularity.

On the stage with *Our Town* the novelty was supplied by:

- (1) economy of effect in scenery:
- (2) the minister was played by the Stage Manager:
- (3) the thinking-aloud passages:
- (4) the oddity of hearing Mrs. Soames' gabble during the ceremony:
- (5) the young people's moments of alarm.

You have none of these things—by a close up of Mrs. Soames even her gabble will lose its oddity and shock. Here is a village wedding and the inevitable let-down when it all runs through *as expected*.

Now, Sol, it's just you I'm thinking about; will you have as *interesting* a picture as you hoped?

This treatment seems to me to be in danger of dwindling to the conventional. And for a story that's so generalized that's a great danger.

The play interested because every few moments there was a new bold effect in presentation methods.

For the movie it may be an audience-risk to be bold (thinking of the forty millions) but I think with this story it's a still greater risk to be conventional. This movie is bold enough in the last sequence, but apart from the three characters who talk straight into the audience's face, there's less and less of that novelty and freedom and diversion during the first forty minutes. I know you'll realize that I don't mean boldness or oddity for their own sakes, but merely as the almost indispensable reinforcement and refreshment of a play that was never intended to be interesting for its story alone, or even its background.

All my best to all, as ever,
THORNTON.

October 19, 1939.

Dear Thornton,

Tomorrow I am sending you a revised first draft script, in which you will note that we have re-captured those elements omitted from the first rough draft, and in which we have incorporated the further suggestions made in your letters to me. You will also find several new ideas which I hope will please you. . .

It was a great satisfaction to me today when we rewrote the wedding scene and used the technique of exposing the characters' thoughts. I see now, more clearly, the purpose of the wedding as you originally intended. I ask you also to edit these lines with the fullest sense of their import. The more I consider this scene, the more value I see in its original form.

I urge you to point out to me wherein you think the picture lapses into conventionality. While this is only our Revised First Draft, I feel we can, without danger, add boldness and novelty, even though our thoughts up to date have not produced anything further than the script shows. . .

Frank Craven has just done a picture for Paramount in

which he played the part of a druggist. Whether this would identify him as the same druggist in our picture I can't say, but I've decided to play safe; so instead of establishing Mr. Morgan as a druggist we have played him as the proprietor of the general merchandise store. I give you this explanation now so you do not fall over backwards when you read the establishing scene of Mr. Morgan in the script.

I know you will not hesitate to speak your mind freely, and I await your further comments, criticisms and suggestions with eagerness.

Gratefully,
SOL LESSER.

New Haven, Conn.,
October 29, 1939.

Dear Sol,

The "Revised First Draft" is before me. Before I speak of it in general I shall take up the few notes I have made. . . . Page 106. I hate to seem like "Vain Author thinks every Word Sacred", but it does seem to me that the cuts in the Death-and-Immortality speech do something to it—in its present shape it reads like a sweetness-and-light Aimee MacPherson spiel. I don't feel violently about this, but suggest omitting "lot of thoughts . . . but there's no post office", and restoring after: ". . . There's something way down deep that's eternal about every human being". Some of the original lines there, and placing, "Yes, all these important things, . . . grow kinda pale around here" to its position after the "Something eternal" paragraph—and then omitting the "And what's left? What's left when memory's gone . . . and your identity, Mrs. Smith?" In other words: The idea of the Relinquishing Earth-Associations follows the Something eternal passage.

However, as I say, I don't feel very strongly about this, and I leave it to your judgment. . . .

The Wedding Scene is better. I still think it's not fresh enough. I don't think that realistic boys in a realistic village would hoot and guy a friend on his way to his wedding. That's Dead-End-Kids city life. And its pretty sententious of Mr. Morgan to say out loud to a friend. "There are a lot of things to be said about a wedding. And there are a lot of thoughts that go on during a wedding". . . .

The papers say that this script has been sent me for my approval. My approval it certainly has. My demurring is just between you and me, Sol, not as to whether it's good treatment and a faithful transcription—that it already is—but whether for your joy as well as mine, it's a movie that beats other movies—and which the public and the critics will receive as a deep movie experience. For that I feel that there is still some more work to be done.

All my best to you all, as ever,
THORNTON.

November 2, 1939.

Dear Thornton,

. . . I do hope you will not permit yourself to feel, to use your own words, "any inexperience in movie values". While agreeing that the medium of the screen is entirely different from the stage, still I hold that if we properly translate the situations from stage to screen, audience emotions will be the same looking at the picture as looking at the stage play. I might use this as an example of a difference: A person might attend a Hollywood Bowl Concert and hear *Aida* played for fifteen minutes by a full symphony orchestra, and thoroughly enjoy it. That same person attending a motion picture theatre and hearing *Aida* played by the identical orchestra in identical



Beulah Bondi (Mrs. Webb), Martha Scott (Emily Webb) in "Our Town"



Dr. and Mrs. Gibbs: Fay Bainter and Thomas Mitchell in "Our Town"

fashion might be thoroughly bored before it is half finished. There is an important difference, One will grow tired of looking at the orchestra on the screen. Something must accompany it which would entertain through the eye as well as the ear. . . .

I now come to a question which needs your guiding answer. It has been suggested that for movie purposes a means be found to attach the third act to circumstances already within the play. I suppose by this it is meant that perhaps there should be a problem affecting the married life of Emily and George growing out of the differences in their mentalities. I cite the following only as an example:—

Emily is brighter than George; in her youth she has the best memory in her class—she recites like "silk off a spool"—she helps George in his mathematics—she is articulate—George is not—she is "going to make speeches all the rest of her life". . . .

Query: Could it be Emily's subtlety in the soda-fountain scene that causes George to make the decision not to go to Agricultural School? The audience gets this, but George feels it is his own voluntary thought. He makes the decision not to go.

Could Emily, after death, re-visit her fifth wedding anniversary . . . and now see her mistake?

Emily in life is likely to have been over-ambitious for George, wanting him to accomplish all of the things he would have known had he gone to Agricultural School, but which he has had to learn mainly by experience. In a single scene we could establish that George did not develop the farm as efficiently and as rapidly as Emily thought he should have. She continued to get ideas out of newspapers and books as she did out of her school books, and had tried to explain them to George, but he was slow in grasping them. She had been impatient very often. Someone else's farm may have been progressing faster than George's, and she may not have liked that. . . .

Now she sees this. She remembers that she was responsible for his not going to Agricultural School. She has overlooked many of George's virtues—she took them all for granted. All this was her mistake. . . .

Could there be a great desire to live, to profit by what she has just seen, rather than go back to the grave—should she long to live—would the audience, witnessing this picture, pull for her to live—and she does?

Others tell me that this, or something like it, would give the picture more appeal to the forty millions, and that it would only change the expression of your philosophy, not the philosophy itself, which would be retained.

Now tell me frankly, Thornton, what do you think? Would it help or hurt the structure? Does it give rise to something that you think might be done within the scope of your original purpose? . . .

Sincerely,
SOL LESSER.

New York,
Sunday, Nov. 12, 1939.

Dear Sol,

My letters seem only to make you unhappy about the work and God knows I don't mean that.

The important thing is that I do think it's a very good script as it is now, and when I do express some reservation about some portion or aspect of it, I don't seem to be able to offer anything concrete to propose in its stead.

However, I feel pretty concrete about trying to dissuade you against showing Emily returning to her fifth wedding anniversary and regretting that she had been an unwise wife.

(1) It throws out of the window the return to the twelfth birthday which you feel is sufficiently tied up with the earlier part of the picture, but which is certain of its effect.

(2) It introduces a lot of plot preparation in the earlier part of the picture that would certainly be worse than what's there now. Scene of George running the farm incompetently. Scene of Emily upbraiding him.

(3) It makes Emily into a school-marm "improving" superior person. The traits that you point out are in her character, her "good in classes", her desire "to make speeches all her life"—but I put them in there to prevent her being pure-village-girl-sweet-ingenuer. But push them a few inches further and she becomes priggish.

(4) The balance of the play reposing between vast stretches of time and suggestions of generalized multitudes of people requires that the fathers and mothers, and especially the hero and the heroine, be pretty near the norm of everybody, every boy and every girl.

If this is made into ineffectual-but-good-hearted-husband and superior-interfering-wife the balance is broken.

It's not so much new "plotting" that is needed, as it is

refreshing detail-play over the simple but sufficient plot that's there. . . .

Cordially ever,
THORNTON.

Telegram to Isabel Wilder Hollywood, Dec. 4, 1939.
WHAT MAKE OF CAR WOULD THORNTON LIKE FOR CHRISTMAS?
SOL LESSER.

Telegram to Sol Lesser New York, Dec. 5, 1939.
THORNTON DOESN'T DRIVE ANY MORE BUT HAS ALWAYS SAID
IF HE HAD A CAR WANTED A CHRYSLER CONVERTIBLE WITH
RUMBLE SEAT. ISABEL WILDER.

December 26, 1939—10.34 P.M. E.S.T.

Dear Sol,

Just to show you that I'm not stuck up because I own the most beautiful car in town (even the Cartwrights turn their heads when I go by now) I'm writing on my old paper. All my sisters were back for Christmas and you never heard such squeals. Everybody had to be taught all the gadgets. When they found that there were little red lights that went on when your oil and gas were low—that slew 'em; and the two speeds on the windshield—oh, and the defroster; and a top that goes up and down without anybody losing their temper. Well, well—first I was so astonished I didn't know what to do, but ever since I've been getting more proud and pleased every hour. A thousand thanks, Sol! wish you were here to see what a big success it is. . . .

THORNTON.

January 5, 1940.

Dear Thornton,

Your two letters, December 26th and New Year's Eve, arrived at the same time, and I feel confident that from them we have achieved the desired result; so the changes have been incorporated into our script, which now takes the form of a Final Screenplay. A copy of this will go forward to you within the next two or three days.

We decided to change the opening of the picture in order to eliminate all mechanical feeling. Our minds out here have all agreed that this final choice is smoother and better. I fought right along to retain the jig-saw puzzle opening to get the illusion of the many small towns that make up the United States, but unquestionably this will assert itself in the picture proper. Our conclusion was that this sort of thing has been done too many times to make it worth while, even though it would serve a purpose.

The picture itself will be treated in an unconventional manner with regard to camera set-ups, following our original idea of introducing properties intended to accentuate the moods and to visualize something deeper than just the mere dialogue. . . .

SOL LESSER.

January 9, 1940.

Dear Thornton,

Under separate cover I am sending you a final shooting script of *Our Town*. Even though it says "final" we are still working, not only for new bold effects but also for a simplification, and I will appreciate very much any further word from you in criticism or suggestion.

I have a feeling that it might be helpful to you in visualizing this script to meet Harry Horner who could show you a



"Our Town". William Holden (George Gibbs), Martha Scott (Emily)

number of the sketches that he has prepared and which in a great many cases have acted as a stimulant to our art designer here. I can't commence to tell you my enthusiasm for the sketches that have so far been prepared. They are indeed artistic, and I think we will get a very unusual result.

Most of the conversational scenes will be played in very close shots, eliminating scenic proportions, in order to capture the original purpose of the play—the non-use of scenery—but at the same time we will have a beautifully scenic production in the places where scenery will serve its purpose. . . .

With all good wishes, I am,

Cordially,
SOL LESSER.

January 9, 1940.

Dear Thornton,

Does it occur to you that we should expose as a premise early in the picture "that human beings do fairly move about in self-preoccupied matter-of-factness—admitting that human beings are inadequate to experience"—all as demonstrated in the last act? If this could be accomplished subtly, yet thoroughly understandably to the forty million, perhaps the third act will take on a still added value.

As an example, Craven says: "And here comes Howie Newsome and Bessie delivering the milk—adding—"Howie, you know, does one of those services that we just naturally take for granted".

While I realize that this premise "cannot be taken as a motto for this picture", do you feel, as I do, that it is an important collateral—which when exposed should have everyone in the audience right where we want him?

Think this through for me and let me hear.

Cordially,
SOL LESSER.

January 13, 1940.

Dear Sol,

. . . Re planting unobtrusively the notion of everybody's inevitable self-preoccupation.

I should suggest that the idea is not so much suggested by the service a Milkman renders—the American Mind assumes that what you get money for cannot be classed as benevolence—but by some picture of a person's not noticing another's need or claim or call, (Chekhov's plays are always exhibiting this: Nobody hears what anyone else says. Everybody walks in a self-centred dream.) Children perpetually feel it as a rebuff:



"Our Town". Fay Bainter, William Holden

"Mama, mama, look what I found—isn't it wonderful?"

"Yes, dear, now go and wash your hands".

It is certainly one of the principal points that the Return to the Birthday makes; when I read the script today I'll be thinking over a way to incorporate some advance indications of it in the earlier part of the picture.

All my best,

THORNTON.

Monday Morning,

January 15, 9.45 a.m.

Dear Sol,

I hope you're as completely pleased and reconciled as I am to the simplifications in the last act—I append a few notes, but they're not important and not meant to wrinkle your brow now when you have so many other things to think about. . . .

Re the Opening. You have thought it over a thousand times and I defer to your judgment, but this opening lacks the largeness that might be there. On the stage, though the whole U.S.A. was not mentioned, the largeness of design was conveyed by the bareness of the stage and the surprise of the direct address to the audience. It may be that during the work of production you will feel the other opening recurring to you. So shooting will begin any day now. All my best to all the forces. How splendid Fay Bainter and Beulah Bondi will be; and Tommy Mitchell. . . .

All regards,

Ever,

THORNTON.

January 17, 1940.

Dear Thornton,

I have your letter of January 15th, which arrived in the midst of our happy excitement incidental to the starting of the picture.

The cast is now practically complete:

Dr. Gibbs	...	...	Thomas Mitchell
Mrs. Gibbs	...	...	Fay Bainter
Mr. Webb	...	...	Guy Kibbee
Mrs. Webb	...	...	Beulah Bondi
Narrator	...	...	Frank Craven
Emily Webb	...	...	Martha Scott
George Gibbs	...	...	William Holden
Howie Newsome	...	...	Stuart Erwin
Mrs. Soames	...	...	Dere Merande
Rebecca Gibbs...	...	...	Ruth Toby

. . . We are now energetically employing what remains of our faculties to devise a new opening. We are all of one opinion here now—that the Narrator should not be too much attached to the story as the druggist. He doesn't have the freedom of the original manager, and I am certain we will come up with what will be the right idea before many nights have passed.

We have been searching but haven't found the emotional reason for Craven starting the story back in 1901, nor have we exactly identified the location where we pick him up. Everyone seems to feel that the opening should have a feeling of air, broadness and scope, rather than being confined in a set or on front of a store, but we can't put our finger on it.

And so the remaining major problems are: the opening, and the situation about which I still expect to hear from you, which will lay down early in the picture some advance indications of the premise exposed by Emily's summing up in the last act.

It is difficult for me to convey to you the extent of my obligation to you for the support that you have given me and the value of your corrections. . . .

We should not consider the script settled until the picture is finished shooting, and there is no difficulty at all about changing any scenes. There will be a practiced orderliness, even while the picture is being photographed, which will permit us to improve where the opportunity affords. . . .

Sincerely,

SOL LESSER.

January 17, 1940.

Dear Thornton,

. . . You are going to get a real thrill, Thornton, when you see on the screen the production of the graveyard sequence as designed by Mr. Menzies. There is great inspiration from the time the mourners under their umbrellas come into the graveyard. We never show the ground—every shot is just above the ground—never a coffin or an open grave—it is all done by attitudes, poses and movements—and in long shots. The utter dejection of Dr. Gibbs—we have his clothes weighted down with lead weights so they sag—the composition of Dr. Gibbs at the tombstone is most artistic—and as Dr. Gibbs leaves the cemetery the cloud in the sky gradually lifts, revealing stars against the horizon—and as the cemetery itself darkens a reflection from the stars strikes a corner of the tombstone which is still wet from the recent rain, and the reflection (hilation) seems to give a starlike quality—and the scene gradually goes to complete darkness. We get a vast expanse of what seems to be sky and stars. When this dissolves to the dead people this same reflection of hilation appears to touch the brows of the dead. It is lovely—something quite bold! Well, it it comes out on the screen as we hope, we will get that feeling of joy.

Cordially,

SOL LESSER.

Monday, January 22, 1940, 4.10 p.m.

Dear Sol,

First: Re suggestion for Additional Business. You notice I've noted 14 O.K.'s; 3 O.K., but finicky; and 6 reservations.

"O.K. but finicky" means the kind of detail-business which might get a laugh, or a moment's pleasant "recognition" chuckle, but which might break the curve of a scene or (still more serious) establish the wrong tone for the picture. A few more stealing-doughnuts; dish towel-errors; four-spoonfuls-of-

sugar; drinking - coffee - out - of - saucers; mothers - looking - behind-sons'-ears—and the audience would be justified in believing they're in one of those pictures Quaint Hayseed Family Life. (I saw a striking example of this establishing the wrong tone last week on the New York stage. Barry Fitzgerald and Sarah Allgood played the first act of *Juno and the Paycock* in the tone Drunken Irishmen and Tyrannical Wives are very very funny. But Sean O'Casey meant that drinking and shiftlessness are the ruin of Ireland—so when Sean O'Casey got around to showing the ruin in the rest of the play, the audience felt that he'd switched his message, and resented it). . . .

THORNTON.

Wednesday afternoon.

Dear Sol,

The new opening's fine.

I shudder at the way you spare no expense, Fences, bridges, nut-trees, distant villages, scarecrows—!

It's fine.

I'm sorry I came home too late yesterday to get my answer off to your telegram about the beginning of work. I wish I could see all those fine actors and fine people gathered together.

And a look at you up in your office when every minute you want to be down in the middle of it.

Sol, I thought I'd found a place to insert that nobody-pays-any-attention-to-anybody motif.

EMILY: Mama, I made a speech in class today and I was very good.

MRS. WEBB (*Abstractedly*): Hm. I mustn't forget that bread in the oven . . . What, dear?

EMILY: Oh, Mama! You never listen to what we're telling you. I said I made a very fine speech in class today.

MRS. WEBB: What was it about? *etc. etc.*

But now I'm afraid of it. Because it puts the burden of self-centredness on Mrs. Webb again, who bears the burden in the last act. (A woman from California!! wrote me, asking me whether the meaning of the play was that New England mothers were so severe that they had no responsive love for their children!!)

I wish I could attach some such brief hitch in the dialogue to somebody else than Mrs. Webb. Mrs. Gibbs could "take it" but I can't find the place (George's spending-money—Rebecca's "Mama do you know what I love most in the world, do you?") without its unnecessarily blocking the forward movement.

Well, I carry the problem around with me wherever I go and will report to you if I see something.

All my best to 1041 and allied departments.

THORNTON.

February 21, 1940.

Dear Thornton,

. . . We are finishing up this week with those of the cast who did not finish last week. They are dropping off like flies. Another twelve days should see the picture completed.

Everyone—not only the "Yes Men"—yes, everyone is most enthusiastic, and I think we have something quite different in novelty, both from the photographic and story-telling

standpoint. Now if the motion picture public wants this kind of a story—all is well.

Cordially,

SOL LESSER.

March 21, 1940.

Dear Thornton,

Well, Thornton, I've managed to work myself into a jam. Or at least I think it's a jam, which is just about as bad, I suppose. Maybe you can help to extricate me. It's a sort of puzzle, and it all comes about with respect to the ending of the story.

The first serious thing to decide is whether we should let Emily live or die. There are two schools of thought here, as naturally there would be. But I find myself bouncing from one side to the other, and I just hate myself because I can't make up my own mind. It is true that we can rely upon a preview, showing both endings alternately, but it is in the event that we choose the happy ending where the problem really lies.

Doug Churchill, who wrote the review for *Red Book*, has counselled me to use the happy ending. He has given us a very flattering review, which he concludes by saying (as nearly as I can remember his words):

"The picture differs from the original play in only one respect: the ending—Emily lives. Those who are purists and who loved the play will be outraged, but to those countless others, like myself, who have during the running of the picture come to love Emily as well as the other characters, it is a most satisfactory and logical conclusion. And since, indeed, this ending has been arranged with the permission of the author, who is there amongst us to criticize? It is a beautiful, inspiring picture". . . .

Cordially,

SOL LESSER.

New Haven, Conn.

Easter Night.

Dear Sol,

Sure, I see what you mean.

In the first place, I think Emily should live. I've always thought so. In a movie you see the people *so close to* that a different relation is established. In the theatre they are halfway abstractions in an allegory; in the movie they are very concrete. So insofar as the play is a generalised allegory, she dies—we die—they die; insofar as it's a concrete happening it's not important that she die; it's even disproportionately cruel that she die.

Let her live—the idea will have been imparted anyway.

Cordially ever,

THORNTON WILDER.

May 9, 1940.

Telegram to Thornton Wilder

I AM SENDING THIS WIRE TO YOU AFTER WHAT I CONSIDER A MOST UNUSUAL AND SUCCESSFUL PRESS PREVIEW. THE VERDICT WAS ONE HUNDRED PERCENT UNANIMOUS VERY FAVOURABLE FROM BOTH PRESS AND LAY AUDIENCE . . . DID YOU EVER SEE A DREAM WALKING? THAT'S ME AS I DICTATE THIS WIRE . . . I FEEL IT IS SAFE TO SAY THAT PICTURE WILL NOT DISAPPOINT ANYONE. AFFECTIONATE REGARDS. SOL LESSER.

Films of the Month



"Storm Warning". Doris Day, Steve Cochran, Ginger Rogers

STORM WARNING

WARNERS, WHO PIONEERED the social reform pictures of the 1930's, have contented themselves in the post-war period with the vague idealisms of *Key Largo*, and the journalistic sensations of *Caged*. In *Storm Warning* they return to their former territory with an exposé of Ku Klux Klan methods. The Klan is reported to be gaining new strength by adopting an anti-Jewish, anti-Communist line: whether or not this is so, *Storm Warning* has all the appearance of dealing with a genuine rather than a fabricated problem. It is the story of a town dominated by the Klan, which is pictured as a crooked but business-like concern, whose leaders take advantage of their position to make off with funds subscribed by lesser members. Their peaceful rule is shattered by a double crisis. A journalist has arrived in the town, determined to expose their methods, and the Klan have him arrested on a minor charge, take him from the jail, and plan to beat him up and run him out of town. In the skirmish he is shot by a trigger-happy young man. The shooting is witnessed by a girl, Marsha, the murderer's sister-in-law, who has just arrived to visit her sister. The crusading young district attorney (Ronald Reagan) trusts the girl, believing that she will identify the criminals, and indicts them. Marsha, however, refuses to ruin her sister's life, and perjures herself on the witness stand. After this losing battle with her conscience, she finally decides to tell the truth—not because of a change of heart but because Hank, the brother-in-law, has attempted to rape her. The denouement is a melodramatic scene at the Klan meeting, where the police shoot it out with the young killer.

Storm Warning has a taut, controlled and exciting script by

Richard Brooks and Daniel Fuchs. The fault of most problem pictures is that the problem is allowed to get in the way of the picture—that considerations of character and plot logic are sacrificed to the temptation to preach at the audience in very clear and simple terms. Richard Brooks, in *Crisis*, fell into this trap when he allowed his characters (notably the dictator) to express their views in this over-simplified dialogue, rather than resolving the conflict satisfactorily in terms of action. *Storm Warning* presents a credible situation, allows its audience to work out its implications for themselves, and does not attempt to weigh the film down with more generalisations than, as a dramatic story, it will bear.

At least two scenes convey a really striking impression of the temper of the frightened, uneasy little town. The opening—Marsha's arrival by bus, the strange silence, the darkness, the empty streets, the sudden shock of the encounter with violence (apparently shortened by the censor for British audiences)—is beautifully tense and compact, and introduces the theme with the greatest economy. Later, before the trial, atmosphere is suggested by a clever device: the crowds, sullen, suspicious, angry and ashamed at the notoriety which has struck their town, are seen through the eyes of a broadcaster who is vainly attempting to obtain their comments.

But the script-writers, unfortunately, have been unable to bring their story to a satisfactory conclusion in terms of the original theme. They switch to melodrama, set off by the attempted rape, and although the director (Stuart Heisler) has handled the Klan meeting with considerable skill, neither he nor the writers can conceal the fact that this is an artificially contrived ending, and that the film has lost touch with its real subject. It is, indeed, a rather queer ending, since it solves



"Manèges". Left: Simone Signoret, Frank Villard. Right: Bernard Blier, Jane Marken

nothing—the Klan, who have been considerably embarrassed by the presence of a murderer in their ranks, will presumably lose little of their power just because they have been made to slink away from a scene of violence. The last shot, however, the symbolic collapse of the fiery cross, suggests that a conclusion has been reached. Actually the writers have merely shifted their focus, and hoped that by a violent climax the switch may go unobserved.

In spite of this ultimate weakness, *Storm Warning* is consistently exciting, on its own level, being capably directed, and well acted by a rather surprising cast. Ginger Rogers, whose previous excursions into the serious field have been not altogether happy, does extremely well as Marsha, and Doris Day plays the easier part of the sister very sympathetically and with considerable technical skill. As the killer Steve Cochran, previously seen in a number of conventional gangster parts, suggests a cross between the familiar hoodlum, and the husband in *A Streetcar Named Desire*: it is a very assured and capable performance.

Storm Warning, being better written, more compact in scope, and less generalised, is a more rewarding picture than many of the recent black-and-white cycle. It shares, however, their failure either to admit that there is no immediate solution to the problem depicted, or to suggest a solution both consistent and convincing.

P.H.

MANÈGES (THE WANTON)

THE STORY OF *Manèges* (for this film a subtle title, almost untranslatable, but meaning in effect the ring in a riding-school) concerns a gold-digging slut who, bent upon making as much money as possible for herself and her mother, marries the middle-aged owner of a prosperous riding-school. When she has bled him dry of nearly everything he possesses, she leaves him and is on her way to find another victim when she is seriously injured in a car smash and paralysed for life. Apart from the fact that such a story is as old as Becky Sharp, at times incredible and frequently overstated (mother and daughter continually splitting their sides with laughter at the deceived husband), it somehow commands respect. It has the inevitability of tragedy, for instance; in the girl coldly and methodically pursuing her own fixed purpose, in the pitiless unfolding of the husband's humiliation as he progresses from selling his first horse to the final loss of the riding-school itself. It has also an effective absence of sentiment or warmth consistent with the amorality of the story: the dialogue, except at the end, is terse, almost banal; the minor characters are

mere figures (the groom, for instance, who watches the whole action with a frightening, expressionless face), and the settings are striking in their bleakness—intimate scenes played in long-shot or seen through glass doors, the desolate ugliness of the riding-school and chill passages of the hospital. The treatment too is in its very nature analytical, telling the story twice—first, through the eyes of the husband (intended to show the girl as a devoted and loving wife) and then through the mother (the girl as she really is). Such a method of narration—perfectly suited to cinema art, though by no means new—here necessitates showing certain scenes twice. To get a different significance out of each, the director (Yves Allégret) uses all the tricks of his trade—different camera angles to reveal different facial expressions, narrator's commentary replaced by the actual dialogue when the scene is repeated, and so on. But, finally, it is this very quality of competence which betrays the film. For in spite of its unity of tone and sincerity of purpose, when the end-title appears one feels that the characters lack depth and that the story is perhaps too impersonal to achieve the tragedy at which it aims.

MARTIN WORTH.

OUR VERY OWN

ANTHROPOLOGISTS, AMATEUR or professional, and students of Americana in particular, are recommended to look at the new Samuel Goldwyn production, *Our Very Own*—a hymn to the ideal American family and the sacred tradition of the Great Mother. Its story is cunningly devised to show the citadel of motherhood stormed, almost entered by the back door, but finally repulsing with honours a most insidious attack. The small-town bliss of the Macaulay family is disturbed when Gail, eldest of the three girls, discovers that she is really an adopted child; the revelation causes her to step outside, as it were, her "family", to look at them objectively, to question the whole structure of her life. She turns on everyone, including her boy-friend, after discovering that her real mother, still alive, lives on the wrong side of the tracks amid stale beer and poker parties. Apparently a retired moll, this unfortunate woman (in her denial of Family, True Love and Refinement) represents to Gail all the pitfalls and tragedies of a world she has never suspected. The poor girl flees for sanctuary to her best friend, a millionaire's daughter.

But all ends, of course, very well. Gail comes to realise that no girl could, in fact, be luckier than herself: her foster parents are all that ideal parents should be, and she returns gratefully to them and to her boy-friend after making a Graduation Day speech on "The Privileges of Citizenship". A plot synopsis



"Born Yesterday". Larry Oliver, Broderick Crawford, Judy Holliday

cannot do justice to the film, for it is in richness of detail and implication that *Our Very Own* is so distinguished. The Macaulay family is beautifully proportioned: parents devoted to each other and their children, mother at once wiser and more fragile than father, Gail in the radiance of blossoming love at eighteen, the younger sister Joan troubled by adolescence (flirting with Gail's boy-friend, being mean and jealous, but revealing a loyal and affectionate disposition at the end) and the youngest, Penny—sweet, eager, talkative, ghastly child. Teen-age pleasures are vividly recorded at Gail's birthday party, in a scene of mass jitterbugging in the Macaulay drawing-room; the piled bowls of fruit are always glistening on the dining table, like the two eggs and bacon at breakfast, the glittering soufflé, rejected only at a moment of emotional tension. The cycle of life is completed by such simple other pleasures as swimming, kissing, television, new clothes and Cadillacs. By contrast, Graduation Day (the educational standard demanded does not seem to be much above our own Common Entrance) appears such a moment of triumph that a massed band turns out and the pageantry is equivalent to a gala premiere.

Finely glib and assured as all this is, the core of the film remains Mother, expressed in the graphic conflict between Mrs. Macaulay—devoted, understanding, indulgent but stern when necessary, and always brave—and the sleazy, peroxidized Mrs. Lynch with her view of the suspension bridge and the ribald party always in the smoky back parlour. The plight of the latter, one might have thought, is pitiable: so it may be, the film implies, but nothing can be done for her. Mrs. Macaulay, on the other hand, must be protected—true, she has everything, but she has everything to lose. "I can't forgive her for doing this to *you*", says Mr. Macaulay in a choked voice to his wife when Gail, distracted at the height of the crisis, does not return home till three o'clock in the morning. At this moment, mothers all over America must be trembling, and their hearts going out to each other.

This noble myth, recurrent in American cinema, has not been so insistently dramatised for some time, perhaps not since *The Best Years of Our Lives*, a film of somewhat more serious pretensions. Certainly a continuity of approach is evident in both these Goldwyn productions, and the respective writers, F. Hugh Herbert and Robert Sherwood, might be as one. Mr. Goldwyn might be surprised to learn how strictly Freudian both films are; for the Pleasure Principle dominates them throughout, and there is no going beyond it. The values of the families in both films are identical, and so strongly ingrained that everyone's behaviour shows a textbook determinism. Poverty and deprivation stay on the wrong side of the tracks, established middle-class pleasures and traditions on the right side. We leave the Macaulays in a closely circumscribed, golden materialist world—in which, presumably, the younger ones will give birth to (or adopt) new Macaulays. It only remains to add that the novelette itself is very adequately acted by Ann Blyth, Farley Granger, Joan Evans, Jane Wyatt, Ann Dvorak and others: photographed with a clear, rich gloss by Lee Garmes: and that the director, David Miller, supplies plenty of impersonal smoothness.

GAVIN LAMBERT.

BORN YESTERDAY

AMERICANS ARE EASILY BEWITCHED by the word "democracy", and a number of recent Broadway successes, such as *Born Yesterday*, *State of the Union*, and some of the Kaufman and Hart comedies, have lightly and ingeniously expounded its simpler virtues. These comedies form a recognisable genre, liberal in tone, cynically tough in style, softening visibly into sentiment when the moment comes to present the message, and unfailingly expert in presentation. Garson Kanin's *Born Yesterday* is certainly one of the most agreeable examples. It is the story of a scrap-iron tycoon who comes to Washington to buy congressmen's support for his nefarious schemes, bringing with him Billie, his mistress, a superlatively dumb blonde. When Billie seems likely to disgrace him before his new society acquaintances, he hires a leftish young writer to educate her, and soon she is visiting the Jefferson memorial, reading Tom Paine, and shouting "Fascist!" and "Cartels!" at the bewildered junk-man. The result, of course, is her exposure of his crooked deals.

The comedy relies essentially on two jokes: Billie's engaging mixture of abysmal idiocy with hard common sense, and the sort of comedy of bad manners, or slanging-match of insults, which is a stand-by on American stage and screen. Kanin uses the formula, but livens it with some wit, and most of his dialogue has been retained, occasionally softened down, in Albert Mannheimer's script. It is a style, however, which tends to grow a little monotonous on the screen, unless the pace of the stage production is retained. George Cukor, an old hand at theatre adaptations, has handled the material efficiently, but in taking the action outside the single set into trips round Washington's official architecture, and in occasionally high-lighting lines which in the original were thrown away, he has lost some of that speed which Laurence Olivier worked up in the British stage production. Cukor's deliberately theatrical approach, besides, is the reverse of the brisk, clever style based on editing which Capra used in *State of the Union*.

Born Yesterday is lifted above the average by Judy Holliday's performance. Playing a small part in *Adam's Rib*, she

(continued on page 456)

SCRIPTING

Penelope Houston

THE ESSENCE OF GOOD screen writing is economy: it is a statement which, I believe, cannot be repeated too often, since it implies almost everything else. It does not preclude digressions—provided they have some purpose—but it implies that the structure of the script will be so fitted to the theme that to cut a scene (or ideally a shot, or a line of dialogue) would throw the whole off balance. It implies that there will be none of that wasteful repetition which is the ruin of so many films, and, moreover, that the theme will be strong enough to carry the picture. Surprisingly often, writers seem to lose interest in a subject (which, perhaps, has little to recommend it) and go chasing after red herrings, or unlikely plot complications, to keep the film going for the requisite ninety minutes.

All this can be seen, in its simplest form, in a thriller. The thriller is always, basically, a chase picture, the interest being either on the side of the pursuers or the pursued. We can usually tell, inside five minutes, what the outcome will be. The screen writer's job is to keep his story moving, to develop all the action along a single line (side-tracking can be disastrous) and to exploit action, to create tension, in such a way that the story's outcome comes, if not as a surprise, at least as a relief from suspense. Raymond Chandler, in an essay on writing thrillers for "pulp magazines", says that the policy was, "when in doubt, have a man come through a door with a gun in his hand". In the same way the screen writer introduces car chases, hold-ups, fights, often arbitrarily but, if he knows his job, to good purpose.

A recent thriller, a minor film of no great pretensions, *Union Station*, is an example of expert matching of subject and structure, and the result is an unusually neat, compact and exciting picture. The chase theme in this film is the police search for a gang of kidnappers who have made off with the blind daughter of a rich industrialist. The action has deliberately been confined to a small area of Los Angeles, centred on the station, which the kidnappers use to make contact with their victims, and where the police lay traps for them. The story begins with the kidnapping, and ends with the shooting down of the gang leader; there are no loose ends, no side-tracking, and each scene or action arises naturally from the one preceding it. This may sound simple enough; in fact, such concentration is rare.

Sidney Boehm, the screen writer, has the peculiarly American talent for writing very simple, idiomatic dialogue which yet does not give the impression of cliché writing. He leaves the main line of the plot only for scenes between the old policeman and the young station detective, and between the young detective and his girl. This is at once a humanising of what might otherwise be a purely mechanical story, and a means of slackening tension without destroying it. Boehm, too, has turned to advantage in the script the location settings used throughout the film. Too often, realistic locations, far from helping the story, tend to obtrude themselves: the writer cannot resist the temptation to embroider on them, to show that life-is-going-on-all-around. Boehm and the director, Rudolph Mate, have used the station crowds, the bustle, the confusion, as a legitimate aid to tension in scenes such as that where the police are waiting for one of the gang to come for the ransom money. It must be noted that *Union*

Station has played at least one unnecessary trick to give the audience a thrill. The police, having captured one of the kidnappers, want to make him talk; when all else fails, they take him down to the shunting yards, and hold him over the line in the path of an advancing train. Of course, he talks. This, which can hardly be taken as a legitimate example of police procedure, and which, if taken seriously, would detract considerably from the hero's generally sympathetic personality, is the arbitrary equivalent of Mr. Chandler's gunman.

The use of tricks is seen at its most uncomfortable in *Highly Dangerous*, a disappointing script from Eric Ambler. This is a spy thriller, in which Margaret Lockwood, improbably cast as an entomologist, is sent to an Iron Curtain country to steal insects which may be used in bacteriological warfare, does so, and has to flee the country with her confederate, an American journalist (Dane Clark). The story is constructed as a double chase: first, the pursuit of the insects, then, the flight from the police. In the scene in question the two fugitives are waiting at a railway station, which is being searched by the chief of the secret police. Three courses could be legitimately followed: the fugitives could be caught; or at least spotted; we could see the search through their eyes, and feel their relief when they are not noticed; or the whole affair could be an elaborate red herring, and they could in fact not be there at all. As Mr. Ambler has written it, we see no less than three couples vaguely resembling Margaret Lockwood and Dane Clark in peasant disguise. In spite of a most detailed search the real pair are able to keep their backs to the police. This is the equivalent of the conjuror's patter which conceals what he is really doing. In this case, it is a trick used to conceal the fact that Mr. Ambler has worked himself into an impasse; his couple have to be returned to England; he is not interested in showing us the mechanics of their flight; he therefore plays rather an elaborate joke on the audience. Although the whole film is constructed as a joke at the expense both of the leading characters and of the audience, and although it tries to have its cake and eat it by at once presenting thrills and guying them, it would, nevertheless, have gained immensely from a firm plot construction.

Yet this is less reprehensible than the thriller which fails to thrill. A recent example has been *Where Danger Lives*, which John Farrow both wrote and directed. It is the story of a demented woman who kills her husband, leads an infatuated doctor to believe that he did it, and (since he is concussed and in no state to argue) persuades him to join her in a flight from the police. The denouement is the doctor's belated discovery of her mental condition. The plot is no sillier than others; the writer has treated it, however, with the sort of solemnity which is death to hokum. He has conducted his chase at funereal pace, cluttered it with portentous, poorly-written dialogue, and to create suspense he, again, uses arbitrary methods, relying far too much on the calculated anti-climax.

It may seem unjust to analyse in this way what are, after all, straightforward commercial films which make no claim to particular distinction. But from every point of view a good standard of popular cinema is desirable; and *Union Station*, with a box-office appeal equal if not superior to the other two, provides a clear model of what the good popular film should be. The lessons it teaches—the value of good writing, neat, economical construction and controlled pace—can be applied to many other kinds of film. Shape and flow, to be achieved in a script, need material of a certain standard; if the material itself is ill conceived and shoddy, the result is usually the confusion which destroys all films—comedies, dramas, thrillers at varying levels—not put firmly and surely together.

ACTING

Philip Hope-Wallace

NO ONE WHO HAS followed John Garfield's career from the early days of Elia Kazan's Jewish theatre will be likely to think of him as a negative or perfunctory actor. Yet that is, I fear, the impression which might be made on anyone who did not know him, by *The Breaking Point*. In the last resort, perhaps, no histrionic talent is proof against the disaster of confusion in the mind of the director of the film. True, the confusion may not have originated there. I don't wish to saddle the director with the blame if, in fact, it should refer back to the script writer. But it is important to acquit Garfield who does what he can but fails to make this hero eloquent.

The confusion stems from a misreading of Hemingway's novel *To Have and Have not*—for what reasons one can only guess; stupidity, fastidiousness or what not. It is easy to label that novel 'ham'; a porridge of Hemingwayisms, sensual, suggestive, sentimental, inside-out. Yet it had an indefinable touch of genius, eluding the parodist. The scene towards the end of this film version where the wife tries to persuade her husband to have his arm amputated, carried all the marks, I thought, of someone's effort to write à la Hemingway, showing just how inimitable the genuine article really is.

Anyhow, this scene was a hopeless last minute effort to make amends. The whole point of Hemingway's story lay in the attraction of Harry precisely because he was mutilated. I think Hemingway probably believed in this. To paraphrase a famous exchange: "The armless are not like us." "No, they have fewer limbs". To have Harry's arm cut off at the end of the picture, as a substitute for his lonely lingering death and his wife's Marion Bloom-like monologue was to miss the point completely. Moreover it was not that Harry Morgan was an angel in the house which made the tragedy of his not returning; it was the fact that his wife, an ex-trollop, found him a satisfactory husband. The whole conception of good American Pop grafted on to Hemingway's hero made Garfield's task impossible from the start; to say nothing of the vamp with the urchin cut who was whistled up out of one of those summer visitors so contemptuously flicked aside in the novel.

Like many actors before or since, Mr. Garfield takes the line of least resistance in the circumstances. The character couldn't be made to add up, but at least one could always look enigmatic; a speaking look which says 'Aha! If you really understood this story you would know why I am pulling a non-committal face like this'. A pity. Imagine Garfield as intelligently directed as, say, Jean Gabin in *La Bête Humaine*, and you would have had at least something to go on.

I do not mean that the enigmatic look, horribly on the increase as a refuge from the responsibilities of real screen acting, is necessarily a sign that the actor himself is baffled, or even that something has gone seriously wrong. And it is not to be confused, for instance, with that faint frown which our own James Mason (also a stage actor of skill, as those who remember his days at the Old Vic will testify) proffers in some emergency with Miss Ava Gardner in *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman*. That frown is, I fancy, motivated by the hope that if one 'non-acts' for long enough at a time, people will sooner or later feel that the fault is theirs and that such completely still waters *must* run very deep indeed.

In an active way the enigmatic look, as applied by, say, Maria Casarès to the ineffabilities of *Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne*, can take on an immense power; to the point where



The enigmatic look: Maria Casarès in "*Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne*"

we in the audience go off the rails ourselves, expecting much more behind it than proves to be necessary and hopelessly complicating the issue.

On the whole, this mysterious, baffling stare (impossible on the stage for any time) is becoming as much of a menace to Wardour Street as the New Look to the Rue de la Paix, and one must hope it will soon be as unfashionable.

Meanwhile it does not end Mr. Garfield's troubles. He is also expected as hero to give off chunks of first-person narrative so that logically we cannot pretend he is not in our confidence. This only makes the look more enigmatic still. Once, when he is ruminating revenge for his butchered mate, one could deduce emotion from his eye. Once, when the vamp said something sharp, his face broke into a smile, which suggested that he had somewhere a sense of humour which might blow the whole thing sky high. But these were no more than vague clues.

Ultimately the fault may be attributed to Hemingway who placed too great a value on the virtues of inexpressiveness and muddled thinking in his heroes. The convention whereby protagonists had to be kings, or in Ouida's day, at least earls, may have been very silly and was liable to provoke a reaction. But the antithesis is worse. The dumb ox is really the least viable of all hero-types, unless of course you as the author are at hand on the printed page to keep managing him. Taken off the printed page and projected on the screen as an independent figure he is so often found to be not merely dumb but hollow—or even (which would upset him terribly) 'gutless'.



The faint frown: James Mason in "*Pandora and the Flying Dutchman*"

A LINE OF EXPERIMENT

Gavin Lambert

EXPERIMENT IN THE CINEMA is usually thought of as a non-commercial activity, the isolation of an artist who will not compromise with the industry, and is either engaged in constant struggles with it to keep his work intact, or somehow manages to make films outside it—thus, in the first category, Stroheim, Vigo, Dreyer, Welles, and in the second, Flaherty or Bunuel. It need hardly be said that many of the most important and original films have been made in this way, and that while the material cost of film-making remains as high as it is the situation is unlikely to change. A charge often brought against the commercial cinema is its rough treatment of the incorruptible artist and—while everyone must be appalled at the thought of half of Stroheim's work lying fragmented in a studio vault, at the plans stillborn after an unhappy mating with commerce—the fact remains that an eight-hour *Greed* is simply not a sound financial proposition. In countries where the cinema is less commercialised, such as France before the war and Italy after it, the price of independence is less high, and a marked degree of freedom, as we have seen, is possible. This seldom lasts for long. Today, probably, few people go to work in the commercial cinema with the kind of ideals that some novelists have credited them with: this does not mean that they are corrupt, or that nothing of value can be produced under present conditions: all kinds of risks can still be taken—from *The Ox-Bow Incident* to *Chance of a Lifetime*—and they are not always financially rewarded; but the top level of both American and British films over the last ten years or more has become stabilised and, in a sense, predictable. It is occasionally exceeded by films like *The Grapes of Wrath*, *A Walk in the Sun*, *Citizen Kane*, *Fires were Started*, *The Third Man*, *Queen of Spades*—films of unequal value but all outstanding for depth of observation or stylistic refinement. These are exceptional. A "good" American film would be represented, rather, by *Crossfire* or *The Men*, a "good" British one by *The Way Ahead* or *Seven days to Noon*. This kind of film represents the commercial cinema at its most familiar best—remembering that each is an example of popular art and has to be appreciated by millions of people to justify itself. The six films previously mentioned, though, are more complex, more individual, and were not all commercially successful.

Their existence points, nevertheless, to the fact of bold experiment—rare though it may be—within the commercial framework. From the industry's point of view, too, a film like *Crossfire* (made at a time when the box-office value of racial problems was uncertain) or *The Men*, and films without stars, like *Seven Days to Noon* and *Chance of a Lifetime*, are experiments almost equally bold. The shrewdest film producers, whatever impatience they may profess with the claims of the artist, realise the necessity of imaginative expansion within the cinema. The greater the range (and, incidentally, the freedom), the less the danger of staleness, of over-indulging in proved formulas.

Bearing in mind the domination of popular cinema, its commercial and social as well as artistic implications, the importance of setting a standard in straightforward entertainment films cannot be exaggerated. It is as unnecessary for every



"Act of Violence". Berry Kroeger, Van Heflin, Mary Astor

film to be a work of art as it is for every work of art to be a masterpiece. Those who deny the cinema's claim to art invariably point to the large amount of trash it produces, though nobody thinks of denying that the novel is a medium of art just because a great many cheap paper-backs are sold in Piccadilly Circus every night. All the same, there is an important distinction to be drawn between trash and entertainment; and if a society in general turns to trash for relaxation, it is the sign of bad times. Popular taste is fluid, it can be degraded or uplifted by relatively simple techniques—most of all in the cinema, where the stimulus is so direct and the recipients in a greater state of passivity than alone by their firesides reading Denise Robbins or James Hadley Chase. Those producers, then, who are not content to make easy money with a regular programme of crude and shoddy second features, but impose a standard of liveliness and craftsmanship, are achieving several things beside making better entertainment films. They are renovating the whole tradition of mass-produced films, by its very nature always in danger of stagnation; they are appealing to something other than the grossest instincts of their audience; and they are training technicians—and perhaps one or two artists—in a way more valuable than merely giving them working experience on mechanical potboilers.

II

These reflections were caused by seeing over the past few months a number of low budget films produced by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, all of them under the authority of Dore Schary, who became executive producer there in July 1948. They are, as it happens, the synthesis of two traditions: Schary had previously initiated an experimental policy at R.K.O., which yielded *Crossfire*, *They Live by Night*, *The Window*, *The Set-up*; and there seems to have been, also, a sporadic tradition of experimenting with new talent on a low budget for a number of years at M.G.M., which trained Fred Zinnemann and Jules Dassin on shorts and "B" pictures, and allowed directors like Vincente Minnelli and Rouben Mamoulian to develop a new style in musicals. The recent *On the Town* and the forthcoming Minnelli-Kelly *An American in Paris* are, indeed, a happy extension of this latter policy.

The first, and one of the most impressive results of Schary's



Signe Hasso, Cary Grant, Jose Ferrer in "Crisis"



The hold-up: Leon Ames, Andrea King, Virginia Field, Keefe Brasselle, James Bell and Marshall Thompson in "The Violent Hour"

general policy was *Act of Violence*, directed by Zinnemann, and one of the few of this group to reach a West End cinema. This is a melodrama about a man who, through cowardice, betrayed to the Germans some fellow prisoners-of-war attempting to escape: after the war, successfully re-settled with a wife and family in his home town, he is tracked down by a mutilated ex-prisoner who escaped death and is bent on vengeance. With a perceptively written, firmly constructed script by Robert L. Richards, some notable acting (by Van Heflin, Robert Ryan, Mary Astor), Zinnemann's handling—employing a good deal of location work—made *Act of Violence* one of the best American films of 1949. The films that have followed in this tradition may be divided roughly into two categories: those like *Act of Violence* which are first features, though they may receive only restricted distribution, made on a budget obviously smaller than usual (these include, later, *Crisis*, *Stars in my Crown*, *The Black Hand*); and others which are produced and distributed as second features, in most cases not shown to the Press. In all there have been about twenty films of this kind to reach this country in the last two years, and it may be interesting to look at them first in categories. The majority are thrillers, all made with a care and workmanship considerably above the average, and in some cases with further distinction. Two (besides *Act of Violence*) are melodramas with social or political slants; two are westerns; two are period pieces; and there are a few comedies, the least successful of all.

Of these, three films at least have qualities worth noting quite apart from the particular perspective—*Crisis*, *Stars in my Crown*, *Mystery Street*—and the others, apart from their technical merits, nearly all manage to exist outside the vacuum of a routine exercise in genre. *Crisis*, which has been reviewed in a previous issue of SIGHT AND SOUND, was the first film written and directed by Richard Brooks, already distinguished as a writer, who collaborated on the script of the highly interesting *Storm Warning*, now showing in London. A political melodrama, at times unsure in the handling and rather too slow in exposition, *Crisis* develops into an excellent arresting character conflict, beautifully played by Jose Ferrer as the South American dictator with a brain tumour and Cary Grant as the American doctor kidnapped to operate on him. Its picture of rival factions in a state on the verge of revolution, and of the civilised person's reaction to violence, is shrewd and considered. *Mystery Street* is also in part the work of Richard Brooks, who co-scripted it with Sydney Boehm

(the scenarist of *Union Station*): a thriller about a girl who is murdered and whose skeleton is not discovered for months later. It is investigated by a research scientist at Harvard who manages to discover, after consulting various photographs of missing persons and matching them to the bone structure of the skeleton, its identity. *Mystery Street* has some entertaining characterisation and tautly constructed scenes. The trail to the real murderer involves a mistaken suspicion of a young man—who had been picked up drunk one night by the girl and has never told the police because he does not want his wife to know—and the couple's reaction to the accusation of murder are well described. The identification of the skeleton is shown in gripping detail, and on a differently macabre plane is the study of an eccentric, vicious and scheming landlady, somewhat mauled by the overplaying of Elsa Lanchester. The director, John Sturges, has not given *Mystery Street*, however, a sustained flow or tension, his handling is accomplished but not vital; and with a less interesting script, this style in *Right Cross* looks very bare. *Right Cross* is the story of a Mexican boxer (Ricardo Montalban) caught in the world of promotion rackets. The only element that raises it above the conventional is the introduction of racial overtones and some highly effective music by David Raksin (who scored *Force of Evil*). Now moved up to first features, John Sturges is a director who knows how to put a film together capably (formerly an editor, he was also responsible for the oddly pretentious *The Capture*, recently shown in London) but has not yet shown signs of a distinct personality.

Stars in my Crown is different from all the other films in this group: a series of reminiscent sketches, light and affectionate, of a small Tennessee town shortly after the end of the Civil War. Its ingredients are basically commonplace, but gain a real freshness from the way they are handled. The narrator, a young man, is in the film an orphan boy (Dean Stockwell), living with the parson (Joel McCrea) and his wife: the parson's homely, practical Christianity reflects a familiar small town ideal. He comes to the town in its early pioneer days, when lawlessness still appears occasionally above the placid surface. He protects a gentle negro (Juano Hernandez) from the persecution of a local landowner who wants to buy his property and organises a local Ku Klux Klan for terrorist purposes; he weans the eager young doctor with an inferiority complex from his materialism; he ministers to the dying in a slow fever epidemic, in which the boy nearly dies and for which he feels partially responsible—since he did not isolate himself



Three scenes from "Stars in my Crown". Above: Dean Stockwell (left) as John; middle: the visit of the conjurer (Charles Kemper); below: Josiah Gray (Joel McCrea) comes to the rescue of Uncle Famous Prill (Juano Hernandez)

during the boy's illness and might have carried the germs. A sentiment coated with nostalgia pervades the film—some, perhaps, may find it too facile, but the mood is set in the opening scenes and all that follows is a consistent development. Now and again the life of the community crystallises with a particular episode: between these, an extension in depth is achieved by various scenes. An old man on his veranda contemplates death, two young children on a haycart revel in the apparent eternity of summer, a light romance develops between the doctor and the schoolteacher, a picturesque travelling conjurer arrives and the whole town turns out for him. The period settings are authentic and careful, the photography has an attractive lightness and clarity of tone. The fluent, sympathetic direction is by Jacques Tourneur, who began in the 30's making shorts for the M.G.M. and has occasionally done work above average (*Cat People*, and a western, *Canyon Passage*, which showed a similar flair for period re-creation). In its reflection of American fondness for this moment of the past, with its simple, sentimental idealism and confidence, *Stars in my Crown* not only administers to popular taste with charm and good humour, but has an unpretentious yet individual appeal of its own. The film has the same producer as *Act of Violence*, William H. Wright.

With a few exceptions the other films have less individuality altogether. Of the thrillers, *The Violent Hour* is with *Mystery Street* the most interesting; its action is compactly confined to one hour, and to a bar and its environs. A homicidal madman escaped from an asylum, who has built up an image of himself as a heroic soldier, tries to find his psychiatrist in the city—not, as one might expect, to consult but to kill him—and, finding his house empty, waits in the bar. When the bartender guesses his identity he shoots him, and holds up the other occupants. The siege that follows is described both from the point of view of the police and of the besieged, the latter watching it on a television set in the bar. The most successful aspect of the film is its tense grip of the central situation, and its characterisation of the young killer, excellently played by Marshall Thompson, who makes him at once horrifying and pathetic. In its attempt to analyse the separate reactions of the people in the bar, and the tensions created among themselves, it is less happy—the script is too superficial, too sketchy. The direction, by Gerald Mayer, whose first film it is, shows distinct promise; firm, concentrated, even when the material is at its least satisfactory. The film was produced by Richard Goldstone, responsible for the *Set-Up*.

For its first half hour *Tension* promises to be a film of equal interest. A melodrama motivated by character rather than mechanical incident, it tells of a mild drugstore salesman who plans to murder his wife's lover, but loses his nerve. The man is murdered after all, and suspicion falls on him. In establishing the situation—the relationship between the devoted husband and his monstrously flirtatious, pleasure-loving wife, and the gross, conceited figure of the lover (all well played by Richard Basehart, Audrey Totter, Lloyd Gough)—the director, John Berry (who made the charming *From this Day Forward*) clearly shows his talent: the realism has a hard, acid edge. But the war of nerves that follows, the ingenious detective who waits for the murderer to crack, is too artificially built up, and the film dwindles into rather tame contrivance.

Another thriller is *Scene of the Crime*, with a routine story about the tracking down of a robbery gang, set in apartments, night clubs, and dark streets. Though unoriginal, it is cleanly made and is concerned—like most of these films—to humanise its characters. Here the detective is shown not simply on the job but in some domestic scenes with his wife,



“Mystery Street”

and the figure of the nightclub floozie involved with the gang (well acted by Gloria de Haven) is played not for brassiness but for pathos. The excellent photography of this film and of *The Violent Hour* is by Paul Vogel, who has since emerged with further distinction on *The Black Hand* and *Battleground*. The handling, rather characterless, is by Roy Rowland, who has also directed a modest western, *The Outriders*, produced by Goldstone, and though again fairly dull as narrative, distinguished for some of the best colour seen in a film of this kind for a long time.

Side Street is rather like *Scene of the Crime*, but with a script (Sydney Boehm) more interesting at times, and some excellent New York location work. A melodrama about a young man, working as a part-time letter carrier, who steals a despatch case which he believes to contain 200 dollars (he needs the money for his wife, who is expecting a baby), finds it contains 20,000 dollars, the spoils of a blackmailing deal, and becomes involved with the blackmailers, it contains some good characterisation (including another nightclub singer, even better played by Jean Hagen) and a dynamically put together car chase, in the back streets of New York at 5 a.m., in the last reel. The scenes between the young couple (Farley Granger and Cathy O'Donnell), though too reminiscent of *They Live by Night*, are pleasantly written, and the film has the further interest of being an early work by Antony Mann—now, with *Winchester 73* and *The Furies*, a successful commercial director. This film has a competence and finish not often found in the small feature, and a drive that distinguishes it from the films by John Sturges or Roy Rowland. The same qualities are evident in *Border Incident*, a thriller about illegal entry into the U.S.A. by Mexican workers, and the detection of a smuggling gang, and in what was perhaps Mann's most interesting film of this period, *The Devil's Doorway*. This is not a good western—it has the gloomy filtered landscapes and mannered triangular figure compositions that contribute to the synthetic effect of *The Furies*—but its presentation of the persecution of the Indians by whites after the Civil War is unusually forthright. The Red Indian hero (played by Robert Taylor), who has fought in the Confederate army, comes home to find himself at the mercy of white traders who, exploiting his lack of legal privileges as an Indian, plan to swindle him out of his land and living. Dramatically, everything goes to pieces after the first half hour, with the introduction of Paula Raymond as a pioneering female lawyer, but there are some outspoken incidental scenes and an effective performance by Louis Calhern as a dishonest, coldly Indian-hating lawyer.

The concern with racial problems in many of these films is perhaps unexpected. Their treatment, though, is not sen-

sational, and even if one may feel at times—with *Right Cross*, for instance—that it does little more than add a side-interest to a routine plot, it seems in general to typify the films' topicality, and the attempt to make them reflect their time rather than their convention. With the period pieces—*The Devil's Doorway* and *The Black Hand* (a competent small-scale first feature about Italian immigrants in New York at the turn of the century, and the activities of a racial-terrorist organisation)—the writers succeed in relating an adventure story, conventional in itself, to social conditions. The melodrama of *Border Incident* springs from a contemporary problem, as it does in the more recent *Lady Without Passport*. This concerns methods of smuggling aliens from Central America to the U.S.A. in general, and, less fortunately, the romance of Hedy Lamarr (glamorous, stateless) and John Hodiak (detective) in particular. Its script is too unoriginal to make for any real excitement or interest, but the handling of Joseph H. Lewis—whose incisive style had previously been apparent in *The Undercover Man*—is admirably smooth and inventive. One sequence, of an aeroplane carrying illegal immigrants forced to land in the jungle, and the passengers (seen from a helicopter shot) falling out among themselves, is composed with real virtuosity.

But perhaps the most remarkable aspect of these films as a group, over and above their stylistic competence and freshness, is the absence of offensive elements—vulgarity, insistence on the details of violence, artifice utterly divorced from life—that disfigure so many popular films, especially less ambitious ones. Though some of these films are conventional in everything except their standards of production, that is not a serious charge to bring. From any creative point of view the cinema over-produces enormously, but while a large proportion of films must remain straightforward entertainment manufacture, the conventional is unavoidable. To a serious critic, *Right Cross* is no doubt an ordinary and rather boring little film, but let him see immediately after it some more representative second feature, and he will realise the advantages of good manufacture. This manufacture, of course, begins with the writing. In a film of some pretensions, like *The Devil's Doorway*, one regrets the use of a novelettish plot but in general the writers of these films have dressed the stories with inventive detail and the kind of easy, naturalistic dialogue that distinguishes a great many American films. On an individually distinguished level there have emerged the talents of Zinnemann, Richard Brooks, Sydney Boehm, the cameraman Paul Vogel, and one or two others with the promise of development. It is a record of considerable enterprise, a line of limited but genuine experiment that shows clearly what a determined, intelligent producer can achieve, and contains a lesson for others.

UNITED STATES versus HOLLYWOOD

Ernest Borneman

The Case History of an Anti-Trust Suit—2

ON NEW YEAR'S EVE, in the midst of tin whistles, paper streamers and funny hats, the court quietly slipped in its final decree. Most of the press ignored it, and the *Herald Tribune*, one of the few papers to notice it at all, came out with a five inch boner headlined "Eight Film Companies cleared of Sherman Law Charges". Six days later, before plaintiff and defendants had found time to study the decision, the whole case threatened to blow up with the compliments of the season. The man who had thrown the fire cracker into Foley Square was Abram F. Myers, general counsel of two of the independent theatre owners' associations, who announced his intention to call upon the House Judiciary Committee with a request to investigate "actions and connections" of one of the judges of the Statutory Court. Alleging that Judge Henry W. Goddard's wife was the owner of a theatre leased to two of the defendants, Warner Brothers and Paramount, he asked for investigation of the "lengthy delays in the case agreed to by one of the judges", and the alleged "indulgence" of the same judge towards defence counsel's "delaying tactics".

Immediately the Government announced its decision to appeal to the Supreme Court, the defendants announced their intention to take cross appeals, and the independent theatre owners, who probably had more at stake than either of the contending parties but had so far been able only to give gratuitous advice as "friends of the court", now announced their intention to intervene actively by petition to the supreme court. Everybody knew, however, that no industrialist had been sent to prison in more than 45 years for a violation of the anti-trust laws, and the degree of unconcern within the industry was most clearly indicated by the almost rock-steady tenor of the majors' stocks. The maximum drop after the announcement of the decision was about one-fourth of a point, and the enforcement of the court's judgment was seen as so distant as to leave things pretty much as they were under the Consent Decree.

As in all previous trials, the Government had failed to obtain its main objective—theatre divestiture—on which all other measures of relief were ultimately dependent. What it had got was a whole grab-bag full of odd concessions which went just a little beyond the terms of the Consent Decree but had the strange effect of being more violently attacked by the exhibitors, who were supposed to have been the main beneficiaries, than by the majors, the unwilling benefactors.

Technically, the court held the defendants' claim that they had a legal method of doing business, based on their copy-right, to be untrue and the method, as such, to be illegal. The decree, in so many words, declared that the defendants had "unreasonably restrained trade and commerce in the distribution and exhibition of motion pictures and attempted to monopolize such trade and commerce". But in effect, while condemning the method by which the defendants had acquired their theatres, the court allowed them to retain control over them, regardless of whether the process of acquisition had been valid or invalid under the Sherman Act.

Moreover, the fact that the court had allowed the defendants a free hand with respect to the theatres they owned, while ordering them to sell films to all other competitors on an auction basis, was immediately attacked not only by the independent exhibitors, but also by those semi-independent theatres and chains of theatres which had in the past reached a working agreement with the majors. Instead of full divorce-ment of exhibition from distribution and production, the court had thrown out the whole discussion of production monopolies and had offered only limited restrictions upon selected distribution practices. Instead of devising a more effective method of arbitration between distributors and exhibitors, the court had washed its hands of the entire arbitration system. Instead of declaring the whole practice of clearing and zoning invalid, the court had substituted competitive bidding on individual pictures for block-booking in groups of five. Instead of making the system of competitive bidding compulsory on a national basis, the court had made it optional by limiting it down to "competitive areas". This was a compromise which pleased no-one.

"As far as the relief aspects of the case are concerned, the defendants might as well have written the decision themselves", said the Assistant Attorney General. The Government had defined a monopoly as restriction of trade and had recommended dissolution of the monopoly as "the traditional judicial method used to restore competition in industries dominated by combinations". The court had rejected this definition and had chosen instead to define monopoly as *conspiracy* in restraint of trade. While the Government had been concerned with the effect, the court had dealt only with the motive; the result was that the defendants were allowed to maintain control wherever the Government had failed to prove that such control had arisen from their "inherent vice", or from their explicit "purpose of creating a monopoly". The court, in fact, went so far as to specify that "ownership by a single defendant of all first-run theatres" was no monopoly if such ownership was the result of the independent exhibitors' "lack of financial ability to build theatres comparable to those of the defendants". This definition knocked hell out of the Government's whole argument, for it had been the very lack of this financial ability that had given rise to the complaint of restricted competition. The question of "inherent vice" had never entered the government's case, and was therefore felt to be entirely beside the point.

Following the same line of logic, the court had dismissed the complaint of monopoly against the defendants "based upon their acts as producers". "None of the defendants", the court said bluntly, "has monopolized . . . to restrain trade or commerce in any part of the business of producing motion pictures". In the limited sense in which the court had defined monopoly, this was perfectly true. The Government's point, however, was not that the defendants, as producers, had attempted to monopolize the studios, but that their triple function as producers, distributors and exhibitors had allowed

them to prevent independently produced films from obtaining distribution comparable to that of their own. The Government had, therefore, petitioned for dissolution of production from distribution, as well as for dissolution of distribution from exhibition. The court, having dismissed the first, had logically to refuse the second.

The independent exhibitors, siding with the Government, complained that, although the court appeared to have frozen the defendants' theatre holdings, it had in fact allowed them to strengthen their hold upon the theatre market. Even the clause calling for the divestment of part-owned theatres was felt to be capable of a second interpretation: if a distributor owned 95 per cent. or more of a theatre he was allowed to maintain control of it, and if he owned less than 95 per cent. he did not automatically have to divest himself of it either but could, on the contrary, petition the court to acquire the whole of it, by claiming that the acquisition did not "unduly restrain competition". If competition was defined as "financial ability" to build or maintain theatres, and if restraint upon competition was defined as "inherent vice", the distributors might well be expected to succeed in obtaining complete control of the theatre market with the approval of the very court which had been called to break that control.

Not only were the independent and semi-independent exhibitors concerned, but the "Little Three", who at the beginning of the trial seemed least concerned with its results, suddenly became extremely disturbed about the provision that permitted the Big Five to retain their theatres, but prohibited the lesser defendants from acquiring or building theatres without court approval.

And even the independent exhibitors who, by the spirit of the decree, were the only ones allowed to acquire new theatres, were dissatisfied because they had been allowed to do so even before this decision. The decision's only result, that they could see, was the sudden inflation in the asking price of theatres available for purchase and of real estate plots suitable for the erection of new theatres.

As for auctioning each picture individually rather than selling all of them *en bloc*, the exhibitor's first reaction was fear of rising film rentals. When unlimited block-booking had been replaced, under the Consent Decree, by limited block-booking in groups of five, the rentals had gone up so drastically that many of the smaller independents had been driven out of business. Now that the expense of auctioning and trade-showing each picture individually had been made compulsory in competitive areas, the exhibitors, aside from the competitive forcing of prices to be expected, saw themselves faced with the possibility of being continually out-bid by the majors' affiliated theatres. Some independent exhibitors foresaw the majors bidding as high as 75 per cent. per film, even at the risk of taking losses, just to keep control of the theatres in a given area. Other exhibitors who, under the old system, had obtained special privileges due to their long establishment in business, now saw the possibility of their being unable to compete with large theatre chains, who were certain to try to buy up all theatres unable to meet the new film rentals.

Even recourse to arbitration was not viewed with too much hope by the independents. Unable to afford legal counsel of the same calibre as the majors, the small exhibitor had learnt, even under the Consent Decree, to desist from arbitration and be content with whatever the majors cared to offer him, rather than to invite their ill-will by entering into legal battles with them.

Nor were the majors themselves entirely happy. Pointing

out that the court decision had specifically named only eight companies and their subsidiaries, they asked whether the decision had any bearing at all upon the industry as such: whether it would, if and when it became law, be applicable for instance to such smaller distributors as Republic, Monogram, and S.R.O., and whether these companies might not be allowed to beat the majors at their own game by acquiring theatres and developing a system of clearances, franchises, formula deals and all the other tricks of the trade, while the majors themselves were specifically enjoined from pursuing any and all of these practices.

But the distributors' worst fear, and the main reason for their cross-appeal to the supreme court, was the possibility that the decision, if permitted to stand on the Government's appeal, would constitute a *prima facie* case of conspiracy for any independent theatre owner who might care to bring private litigation against them. The decree, therefore, did not merely threaten them with a possible loss of income in the distant future, but put them in imminent danger of millions of dollars of damage claims stretching back through the whole period prescribed by the Statutes of Limitation.

Small wonder, then, that the Supreme Court, when it came to rule on the various appeals and cross appeals, found itself with nothing else to do than to throw out all six key issues of the Statutory Court's decree—*theatre divestiture, joint ownership of theatres, franchises, cross-licensing, auction bidding and arbitration*. Most importantly, however, it ruled against the whole principle of defining restraint of trade in terms of *intent* and defined it instead in terms of *effect*.

"It is", said the Court in a ruling specifically addressed to the Griffith Circuit, "not always necessary to find a specific intent to restrain trade or to build a monopoly in order to find that the anti-trust laws have been violated. It is sufficient that a restraint of trade or monopoly results as a consequence of a defendant's conduct or business. . . . So it is that monopoly power, whether lawfully or unlawfully acquired, may itself constitute an evil and stand condemned under Section 2, even though it remains unexercised. . . . We remit to the district court not only that problem but also the fashioning of a decree which will undo as near as may be the wrongs that were done and prevent their recurrence in the future".

This, for the first time in the history of the case, was a decision so clear-cut that two of the defendants did not even bother to wait for the district court to "undo the wrongs that were done" before they decided to compromise and apply for a new consent decree. The other three of the Big Five, however, decided to play for time and launch another series of appeals.

What followed was most instructive. Both groups, of course, now accepted the principle of divestiture, but whereas the three die-hard companies—MGM, Warners and 20th Century-Fox—got little more than an extension till July 1953 to carry out the order of the Court, the two conciliatory companies—RKO and Paramount—succeeded in obtaining a major concession: after splitting themselves in two, the new production-distribution outfit was allowed in due course to reacquire theatres while the new theatre-owning company was permitted in due course to produce films again.

This, of course, was a direct violation of the spirit of the Sherman Act and, if it proved anything, it proved once more how easily the purport even of the Supreme Court's decisions could be overruled by the weight of economic pressure; but it had also the farcical result of showing how fast the three die-hards could run when they saw a good thing.

Warner Brothers was the first of them to apply for a consent decree of its own. Submitted to the Trial Court on January 4, 1951, the draft immediately raised a question which was to influence all further divorce argument—the question of who was to run the new companies. Would the three Warner brothers, for instance, be allowed to take charge of the three new production, distribution and exhibition companies?

The Government said “No.” Whereupon the three Skouras brothers, who run 20th Century-Fox, declared that they would only agree to a consent decree which left them in charge of the three new 20th Century companies to be set up.

By then, however, a much more serious problem had crept up which took the whole case back to its economic roots. RKO, which was now ready to implement its consent decree, found itself faced with a demand for immediate re-payment of \$8,500,000 worth of loans. Why? Because the production-distribution end of RKO had been operating at a loss all through 1950 and had been kept above water only by the profits of the theatres.

A quick look at its books told Warner’s creditors that things, though less acute, were hardly satisfactory there either; for whereas the theatre-owning wing had earned a fair 62 per cent. of the company’s totals over the last ten years, the production-distribution end had earned a bare 32 per cent. of the net. Since the consent decree now proposed that all stockholders would receive one half share in each of the new companies in exchange for each share in the old one, the question naturally arose whether the gains of the new theatre company would continue to offset the possible losses of the new production-distribution company.

So far for the majors, their creditors and their stockholders. As for the independent exhibitors, who might have been expected to be pleased now that they had at last obtained what they had asked for, the whole situation had been altered by the advent of television. Rightly, they now feared that the new production-distribution companies, unhampered by any royalties to their one-time theatres or to any others, would now sell freely to television networks, 16mm users and other non-theatrical buyers, leaving the theatres with a scarcity of films, an increase in competition, and an inflation of rentals.

From an enemy of monopoly, the independents now turned into active monopolists, banding together to exert pressure on distributors not to sell pictures to television networks under threat of losing theatre-owning customers. The Justice Department’s Anti Trust Division, once the theatre-owners best friend, now became their worst enemy when it supported the television networks in their battle against theatre pressure. And to make the paradox complete, the independents now began to clamour for a re-unification of the divorced majors so as to give the producer-distributors a new vested interest in theatre-ownership.

That made just about everyone unhappy. When the Justice Department, the Little Three, the Theatre Pools, the Large Independents, the Small Independents, and the Big Five had all had their say, everyone thought that everything had been said that could be said. Then a new voice spoke up. The Internal Revenue Bureau, bland as only tax collectors can be, announced that the winners of treble-damage awards in successful anti-trust actions brought by independent exhibitors against major distributors would have to declare their awards as personal profits, and pay income tax on them at the top rate of 80 or 90 per cent. This meant that if he failed to recover his costs, the exhibitor, after paying his attorney’s fees,

would probably find himself in the red as a result of seeing justice triumphant.

While the merry haha of the ultimate paradox went echoing down the doric halls of the U.S. Court House, the silent man in the visitors’ gallery silently got up and walked out to pay homage. Depositing his two quarters at the box office of his local theatre, he became once again the consumer who foots the bill. All through the trial, the defendants contended that all their trade practices had been developed precisely so as to bring the best pictures at the cheapest price to the largest number of consumers, while the plaintiff contended that it had been precisely the public which had been most grievously harmed by the defendants’ attempts to force prices and withhold pictures from competitive theatres. Neither plaintiff, nor defendants, nor the court bothered to define what was meant by the “best” pictures. It was notable, however, throughout the trial, that whenever a defendant spoke of a “good” film he was in fact referring to one which had been expensive to produce, or which had grossed well at the box office. In either case, *aesthetic value* or, to use the industry’s own vocabulary, *entertainment value* had been identified with an economic category of sorts. If any single incident was required to point up the common failure of all parties concerned in the conflict, it was this failure to see the motion picture as something transcending the terms of economic categories.

For what happened to RKO and Paramount after they had begun to put divorcement measures into effect was far from reassuring. Without certainty of theatrical outlets, their distribution offices now began to exert more pressure than ever on the production staff to turn out “sure things” rather than “prestige items”. This meant that whereas in the past there had been occasional scope for experimental films in which the production people could do their best work, divorcement had now removed the margin of certainty which theatrical outlets had once provided. Instead of better films, the public got routine grist from the celluloid mill.

The most salient comment on this situation was made by the Stanford University Law Review which attacked the Government’s brief, the Supreme Court’s ruling, the Trial Court’s decree and the two consent agreements alike on the simple grounds that a form of divorcement which left production at the mercy of distribution, and distribution at the mercy of vast theatre circuits, was worse than no divorce at all.

Urging a separation of production from distribution and a break-up of all chains of theatres, the article termed the present system an “oligopoly” which would continue to monopolise the market by dint of the small number of distributors and their excessive power.

In this connection it is significant that the American Civil Liberties Union filed a motion asking leave to intervene as friend of the court on the ground that “the questions involved . . . are of paramount sociological importance and vitally affect . . . the general public in the attainment of maximum freedom and diversity of expression . . .”, and that this petition was denied by the court on the ground that “the interests of the public are amply represented by the Government in this case”.

The Government’s brief admitted that public interest was directly involved, inasmuch as the admission prices of all theatres, whether independent or controlled by the Big Five, were in effect controlled by the trade practices of the Big Five; but the very definition of “public interest” in these terms stood as an indictment of the whole procedure.

SIGHT AND SOUND'S GUIDE TO CURRENT FILMS

Brief Pointers to the principal films showing in British cinemas during March. Last-minute changes of programme after our press-date may cause one or two inaccuracies (chiefly in the London area) but we hope this list may serve as a useful general guide. Films with an asterisk are particularly recommended.

***A WALK IN THE SUN** (*Eros*). Made in 1945, a kind of sequel to *All Quiet on the Western Front*, this is an account of a group of American soldiers on an Italian beach-head, and a masterpiece. (Dana Andrews, Richard Conte, Lloyd Bridges, John Ireland: director, Lewis Milestone.)

ABBASSO LA RICCHEZZA (*Archway*). Anna Magnani and de Sica are excellent in this comedy of sudden wealth and sudden poverty, but their material is poor. (Director, Righelli.)

***ALL ABOUT EVE** (*Fox*). Overlong, uneven, but often witty account of a young actress' quietly unscrupulous rise to fame. Splendid performance by Bette Davis. (Anne Baxter, Gary Merrill, Celeste Holm: director, Joseph L. Mankiewicz.)

BANDIT GENERAL, *The* (*International*). Romantic melodrama set in Mexico, a competent, richly photographed remake of a Mexican film, *Enamorada*, itself partly derived from Sternberg's *Morocco*. (Pedro Armendariz, Paulette Goddard: director, Emilio Fernandez.)

BATTLE OF POWDER RIVER (*G.F.D.*). Energetic pro-Indian western in Technicolor, with interruptions from Yvonne de Carlo. (Van Heflin, Jack Oakie: director, George Sherman.)

BLACKMAILED (*G.F.D.*). Various people involved in a blackmailer's activities, and their efforts to escape. Undistinguished. (Mai Zetterling, Dirk Bogarde: director, Marc Allegret.)

BORN YESTERDAY (*Columbia*). Judy Holliday brilliant in quite entertaining transcription of Garson Kanin's comedy. (Broderick Crawford, William Holden: director, George Cukor.)

BREAKING POINT, *The* (*Warners*). New version of Hemingway's "To Have and Have not", about a boat-owner's struggle to earn an honest living and maintain his self-respect. Too slick and artificial in style, but redeemed by John Garfield's fine performance. (Phyllis Thaxter, Patricia Neal: director, Michael Curtiz.)

CESAR (*G.C.T.*). With this, the third part of Pagnol's robust, loquacious trilogy of Marseilles life, the adventures of *Marius* and *Fanny* conclude in marriage. (Raimu, Fresnay, Orane Demazis: director, Marcel Pagnol, 1934.)

DARK MAN, *The* (*G.F.D.*). The search for a murderer lurking on the Sussex coast: good location work but poorly contrived story. (Edward Underdown, Natasha Parry, Maxwell Reed: director, Jeffrey Dell.)

***DOMENICA D'AGOSTO** (*Film Traders*). The lives of rich and poor contrasted and entwined one afternoon on a Roman pleasure beach: a little too slight, but fresh, gay and lively. (Anna Baldini, Franco Interleggi: director, Luciano Emmer.)

FRANCHISE AFFAIR, *The* (*A.B.-Pathé*). Mystery story about the clearing of two women accused of solving the servant problem by kidnapping a maid; ingenious if improbable story, adequately screened. (Michael Denison, Dulcie Gray: director, Lawrence Huntington.)

GAMBLING HOUSE (*R.K.O.*). Routine melo about a gangster, who, threatened with deportation, reforms and gains American citizenship. (Victor Mature, Terry Moore: director, Ted Tetzlaff.)

GHOST GOES WEST, *The* (*British Lion*). Revival of René Clair's sprightly, uneven, sometimes touching comedy made in England, 1935. (Robert Donat, Jean Parker, Eugene Pallette.)

GREAT MISSOURI RAID, *The* (*Paramount*). Western concerning the adventures of outlaws Frank and Jesse James, and the Younger Brothers. Strictly routine. (Wendell Corey, Macdonald Carey, Ward Bond: director, Gordon Douglas.)

KIM (*M.G.M.*). Deviationist version of Kipling, with lavishly authentic Technicolor backgrounds and too little adventure. (Dean Stockwell, Errol Flynn: director, Victor Saville.)

KING SOLOMON'S MINES (*M.G.M.*). Large-scale, well photographed account of safari in Africa: Rider Haggard story, wild animals, local Technicolor. (Stewart Granger, Deborah Kerr: directors, Compton Bennett, Andrew Marton.)

LATE EDWINA BLACK, *The* (*British Lion*). Adequate, straightforward transcription of a stage thriller in the *Gaslight* tradition. (Geraldine Fitzgerald, David Farrar: director, Maurice Elvey.)

LONG DARK HALL, *The* (*British Lion*). Rather dimly contrived drama about a philandering husband unjustly accused of murder. (Rex Harrison, Lilli Palmer: directors, Reginald Beck, Anthony Bushell.)

MAN WHO CHEATED HIMSELF, *The* (*Fox*). Thriller about a detective who has, unknowingly at first, to track down his own brother; not very plausible, but well made and acted by Lee J. Cobb, John Dall. (Jane Wyatt: director, Felix Feist.)

MANEGES (THE WANTON) (*Films de France*). Cleverly told, well acted but superficial story of a greedy girl, conniving mother and duped husband and final tragedy. (Simone Signoret, Bernard Blier: director, Yves Allegret.)

MANON (*Studio One*). Clouzot's hotted-up modernisation of the Abbé Prevost: the eventful affaire of an ambitious slut and an ex-Maquis black marketeer. Mainly crude. (Cecile Aubry, Michel Auclair, Serge Reggiani.)

MATING SEASON, *The* (*Paramount*). Thelma Ritter, the proprietress of a hamburger stand, saves her son's marriage to an ambassador's daughter: average comedy. (John Lund, Gene Tierney: director, Mitchell Leisen.)

MR. DRAKE'S DUCK (*Eros*). Comedy about a duck that lays a uranium egg. One or two good moments, more *longueurs*. (Douglas Fairbanks Jr., Yolande Donlan: director, Val Guest.)

***ORPHEE** (*Films de France*). Revival of Cocteau's fascinating re-telling of the Orphic myth. (Jean Marais, Maria Casarès, Francois Perier.)

OUR VERY OWN (*R.K.O.*). Adored eldest daughter in small-town family discovers herself to be adopted, and reacts with horror. Goldwyn's slick and rather frightening tribute to the blessings of motherhood, the family, and the American way of life. (Ann Blyth, Farley Granger, Joan Evans: director, David Miller.)

PANDORA AND THE FLYING DUTCHMAN (*Independent/British Lion*). In Spain, in the 1930's, an American girl falls in love with a man who turns out to be the Flying Dutchman, during one of the brief periods of human existence allowed him by the legend. A pretentious extravaganza in superb Technicolor. (Ava Gardner, James Mason: director, Albert Lewin.)

POOL OF LONDON (*G.F.D.*). Melodrama with effective London locations, a good performance by Earl Cameron as a Jamaican in love with an English girl, but a disappointingly timid approach to the problems raised. (Susan Shaw, Bonar Colleano: director, Basil Dearden.)

RAWHIDE (*Fox*). Western about a young couple imprisoned and threatened by outlaws in a lonely mail-coach stopping place: starts slowly, but works up a good deal of tension. (Tyrone Power, Susan Hayward, Hugh Marlowe: director, Henry Hathaway.)

RIO GRANDE (*Republic*). New John Ford western that bears, alas, too many marks of the potboiler. (John Wayne, Maureen O'Hara.)

SAMSON AND DELILAH (*Paramount*). De Mille's biblical colossus, garnished with sex: mostly very vulgar. (Victor Mature, Hedy Lamarr.)

711 OCEAN DRIVE (*Columbia*). Semi-documentary melodrama dedicated to exposure of crooked bookies in California: cut to pattern but fast and quite exciting. (Edmund O'Brien, Joanne Dru: director, Joseph H. Newman.)

***STORM WARNING** (*Warners*). Exciting, very well written story exposing Ku Klux Klan activities in a Southern town. (Ginger Rogers, Doris Day, Ronald Reagan: director, Stuart Heisler.)

13th LETTER, *The* (*Fox*). American version of Clouzot's *Le Corbeau*, about a poison pen outbreak in a provincial town: the original has been copied with care, but the result is greatly inferior. (Charles Boyer, Linda Darnell, Constance Smith: director, Otto Preminger.)

THREE GUYS NAMED MIKE (*M.G.M.*). Three men, all named Mike, in love with the same air hostess. Weak romantic comedy. (Jane Wyman, Howard Keel, Van Johnson: director, Charles Walters.)

***VIE COMMENCE DEMAÎN**, *La* (*Blue Ribbon*). A young man interrogates various celebrities on the subject of the future: with illuminating results from Sartre, Jean Rostand and Le Corbusier, and no change from Gide and Picasso. (Director, Nicole Vedres.)

THE OTHER CINEMA

The cinema ceased to be international with the coming of sound, and the necessity of subtitling has made the import of foreign films a more expensive undertaking. Only specialized audiences will sit through a foreign film unsubtitled, and even they might blench, say, at a feature from Egypt or China shown neat. An unfortunate result is that many national cinemas are almost unknown outside their frontiers—"the other cinema" is a cinema of hundreds of films made in Eastern Europe, in Asia and Africa, in some cases a cinema prosperously established for twenty years or more, in others a new cinema eagerly expanding.

In the hope that information about some of these films may act as an appetiser, and help to create a demand in time, SIGHT AND SOUND will occasionally present "the other cinema" in print and stills. The first of this new series is concerned with the current Japanese cinema: before the war, it should be remembered, Japan produced nearly as many films each year as the United States.

1. JAPAN

Immediately after the war, the Japanese film industry, spurred by the flood of American musicals and the public's desire for complete escapism, experienced a boom for American patterned musical comedy. This boom has now burst without producing anything significant, and Japan has returned to its traditional demand for more serious, more tragic stories. The American influence remains, however, particularly in the production of crime films.

Most of the pictures in this crime cycle are completely divorced from Japanese life in that they portray U.S. style gangsters quite alien to their Japanese real life counterparts: in some of the worst examples, the result appears to be a burlesque of an American film. Recently, however, there have been two crime films closer to indigenous conditions and of some stylistic interest. *Harukanari Haha no Kumi* (*The Distant Motherland*), starring Sessue Hayakawa—one of the few Japanese actors to become internationally famous—tells of a migrant killer who escapes from Brazil to lead a normal life in Japan; and *Skyandaru* (*Scandal*) is based on the postwar epidemic of corporation and government scandals. There is also *Ma no Ogon* (*The Devil's Gold*), freely admitted to be an imitation of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, competently done and with people and places altered to suit Japanese character and locale.

A different kind of influence is the adaptation of popular Western novels to a Japanese setting. *Fukkatsu*, a transposition of Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, with some typically faithful sequences of lower class life, is an interesting example of this. Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*

has also been filmed, beautifully photographed and well acted (with Sessue Hayakawa), and directed by Daisuke Ito, who made the first crime picture discussed.

A popular theme of the more purely Japanese cinema is the conflict between "the old" and "the new". The "new" wins more often. The most important picture of the cycle has been *Munekata Kyodai* (*The Munekata Sisters*), directed by another important name, Yasujiro Ozu, and with two of Japan's most popular stars, Kinuyo Tanaka and Ken Uehara: one sister chooses the classic Japanese way of life, the other the life of the "new Japan". A number of comedies have also been made on the same theme, of which *Yama no Kanati ni* (*Beyond the Mountains*) is the best. Its picture of Japanese youth is natural and unforced. Like many Japanese films based on novels, it is in two parts, each of standard length: the second part of a two part film plays at the same cinema the following week.

Japanese film critics, whose standards are as high as their colleagues' in the West, have elected *Sonogono Hachinosu no Kodomotachi* (*Children of the Beehive*) the best postwar picture. The film's hero is a highly maladjusted boy who faces many difficulties in his return to a more normal life in a small social settlement for war orphans and vagrant children. The director, Hiroshi Shimizu, has used many amateur actors, making the film in the style of *Sciuscia* and *The Quiet One*. His success has led to a plague of imitations. Other aspects of war and postwar life—the rehabilitation of an ex-soldier, the deserter, the grimness of jungle fighting—have been widely explored.

At the present time Japanese film production is in the hands of six companies, three of them postwar developments, and another two also controlling many other interests in the entertainment world. The Shinto Company, founded since the war, usually makes pictures technically more competent and artistically more interesting than the others (*Beyond the Mountains*, *Children of the Beehive*): the studios have old but adequate and versatile equipment, and have recently been aided by the importation of several new Mitchell cameras. The majority of the studios are in and around Tokyo: Shinto now turns out fifty films a year, the others between thirty and forty. The average cost lies between £12,000 and £18,000, but a quickie is often turned out for as little as £7,000. Top stars receive £1,000 a picture, and leading directors the same sum if they also provide the scenario. Novels are the source of over half of the Japanese scenarios, and novelists are paid an average of £500 for screen rights. The Fuji Company has a monopoly of stock supply, and the big achievement of 1950 was the perfection of a three colour process. Its high costs will prevent frequent usage at present.

The industry itself, like others, is now facing a depression, a result of higher costs and lower attendance that have inevitably reduced production. Foreign competition has accelerated this, and the production-distribution-exhibition organisation can easily convert itself to the showing of foreign films when local production fails to pay. Last year there were 151 foreign feature releases—90 American, 31 French, 23 British, 3 Russian, 3 Italian, 1 Australian. The Japanese made 172 features, but the figure will be lower this year.

As for the international market, the companies are little concerned at present to interest foreign audiences, with so intense a rivalry on the home market. But *Les Misérables* (for which French and American distribution contracts have now been signed) may be a prelude of things to come.

JOSEPH L. ANDERSON.

Opposite: stills from recent Japanese films

Top left: the old and the new Japan confront each other.—The two sisters in "The Munekata Sisters"

Top right: the young couple of "Beyond the Mountains"

Centre, left and right: the rehabilitation centre in "Children of the Beehive"

Below, left: traces of American influence. Toshire Mifune as the ex-soldier (second from left) in "The Quiet Fight"

Below, right: Yasujiro Ozu, in white hat, directing actors of "The Munekata Sisters"



TELEVISION

THE LAST MONTH has been remarkable not so much for anything which has happened inside television as for a quite astonishing change in the attitude of the outside world towards it. In the last year or two, of course, television has been growing steadily, but quite suddenly it has jumped into the full glare of the publicity limelight. Clearly one of the causes is the publication of the Beveridge Report; but another, and no less important cause, is a growing public concern for the future of television which has displayed itself at many levels. The question uppermost in many minds is no longer whether television will grow, or how fast, but to what purpose; a controlled servant of the public good, or a gigantic all-pervading pander to popular amusement? Or, to put it another way, are the public to have what they want or what is good for them (to say nothing of the many supplementary questions which this one raises)?

Let me give some examples of this display of public concern. In December, Mr. T. S. Eliot wrote a letter to *The Times* referring to anxiety among persons of his acquaintance in America "about the social effects of this pastime, and especially about its effect (mentally, morally and physically) upon small children", and suggested we should be equally concerned in Britain before popularising it further. He made it clear that he was not concerned primarily with considerations of quality by adding: "the fears expressed by my American friends were not such as could be allayed by the provision of only superior and harmless programmes; they were concerned with the television habit, whatever the programme might be".

Other letters followed including one from Mr. Norman Collins, typifying Mr. Eliot's attitude as "anti-Caxtonism brought up to date", and suggesting that "what still remains important is that we should seek to ensure that the end in the home is not unworthy of the means at the transmitter". The correspondence was neatly and lightly brought to an end by a letter dated January 1851, suggesting some of the horrible social consequences of the growing "photographic habit".

In more popular newspapers, interest in television (and broadcasting) has appeared in a different form. *The News Chronicle*, for example, has invited its readers to write letters for publication on set questions under the title *The Listener Answers Back*. *The Evening Standard* has established a "T.V. Jury", consisting of two well-known public figures and two readers at each session, their discussion on set questions being reported at length. The first question put to this T.V. Jury, incidentally, was whether the public should have the television entertainment it wanted, or the kind the B.B.C. thought good for it. One wonders whether the result was entirely what *The Evening Standard* expected. No member of the Jury came out flatly for the dictatorship of popular choice, and one spoke against it.

Nowhere, however, have these issues been debated more fully and more forcibly than in an article in the current issue of *The B.B.C. Quarterly* by Mr. Graham Hutton, called the *Challenge of Television*. "The film industry", he writes, "has 'entertained' the massed millions of our western world; yet its future and finances are alike uneasy, in Britain and California. And, by its own admission, it fails to 'hold' the adult population over the age of thirty or even less—the majority of voters and adults. And consider sound radio. In American private-and-sponsored broadcasting it has become 'mere

entertainment'. Yet its failure to 'hold' adult society is self-confessed and partly explains the clean sweep television is making—itsself doomed to go along the same rails".

Again: "It would be a tragedy—to be bitterly regretted and dearly paid for—if television were henceforth to identify its aim and purpose with the fatalistic functions of the cinema, the comic-strips, and the modern equivalents of the Roman amphitheatre. These are what that amphitheatre degenerated into: the escapology of a mass-democracy in decline, the 'opiate of the people' after they had lost their old religion. But television is something new. It does not have to go on, as the Byzantine amphitheatre went on after Christianity, copying the worst excesses of an earlier age. Or *does* it? That is the challenge".

Mr. Hutton discusses in some detail the ways in which television could, without injury to its entertainment function, and maintaining the highest standards of quality, cater for what he calls 'the serious side'. It is difficult to avoid the temptation of excessive quotation and I would refer all those who are interested to the article itself. Here, to conclude, however, is what he says about the recurrent question of giving the people 'what they want':

"Some will say, as they said nearly two generations ago about the films: 'That isn't what the customer wants. Why dictate to him? Why not put all our television money (small as it is) on mere entertainment?' First, the 'customer' for television has not 'jellied' yet into one mould; secondly, a fair proportion of them do want the 'serious' things I have listed above; thirdly, even if none of them did, a democracy cannot afford *not* to use television in this way; and fourthly, the experience of the films and sound radio and the popular press, in all lands, is against such a question."

* * *

The Beveridge Report has been (and is being) discussed in many quarters, and there seems no point in plodding over well-trod territory here, even if there were the space to do so. It has brought one issue into the foreground, however, which is of vital concern to the film world, namely the use of television in cinemas. Large-screen television has been technically possible for many years, and it could enable the film industry not only to televise its films to cinemas as an alternative form of distribution, but also to relay live programmes from the B.B.C. and from its own private studios. The Beveridge Committee recognised, however, that all this involved the risk of creating a formidable rival to the B.B.C. in a field where till now it has held a monopoly. Not only might the B.B.C., against heavy exclusive commercial competition, find it difficult to obtain rights to televise such spectacles as large sports events, but there is no guarantee that home listeners might not sooner or later be able to pick up the cinema programmes direct, and this would provide an alternative broadcasting service which could well become the thin end of the wedge for sponsored programmes.

The Beveridge Committee have, therefore, recommended that television facilities should be granted to the film industry subject to certain safeguards. How far such safeguards are likely to be effective it is difficult to say. As *The Times* has recently pointed out (January 24th) the problem is full of unseen complexities. The B.B.C. might find, for example, that while they had access to sporting fixtures on reasonable terms, they were being denied access to more important top-line stars and script-writers because these latter were bound to commercial interests by exclusive and well-paid contracts.

* * *

Meanwhile, one of the more curious results of living in an

age of transition is described in a listener's letter to the current issue of the *Radio Times*, "On January 12", she reports, "we wanted to watch 'Alibi' and 'Puzzle Corner' in *Kaleidoscope*, but also wished to hear as much as possible of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony on the Home Service. We, therefore, turned off the sound on the television set during the items in which we were not interested. In this way we had the intriguing spectacle of a pair of dancers dancing to the accompaniment of the slow movement from Beethoven's Seventh. The extra-ordinary thing was that the timing was perfect. . . ."

ERNEST LINDGREN

CORRESPONDENCE

"SPOTLIGHT ON FILMS"

The Editor, SIGHT AND SOUND

Dear Sir,

I am indebted to Mr. Alan Brien for drawing, in his review of my book, "Spotlight on Films" (SIGHT AND SOUND, January), my attention to a bad case of near-plagiarism, to which I plead guilty. It is one of those tricks one's memory is apt to play. Roger Manvell's felicitous classification of certain recurrent types of film themes had apparently stuck in my mind so that while writing on the subject I unwittingly committed an act of "lifting". I hope Dr. Manvell will accept my apologies.

As to the rest of Mr. Brien's review, I feel that as a critic he is far more exacting than exact. He quotes from Sir Michael Balcon's foreword (p.5), referring to it as "the blurb"; he complains that my editing sequence from *Hue and Cry* is "never discussed or analysed", while this is, in fact, done on two pages (pp. 227 and 228) facing that very sequence; he "recognises" Margaret Lockwood in a photograph showing another, unnamed actress under make-up treatment. (plate facing p. 192); and he finds "hardly a reference" to the part which photography plays in film production, while I have devoted three whole pages (pp. 194-197) and many references (see my Index under "Camera") to the subject.

I cannot help feeling that Mr. Brien takes some strange delight in deliberately misunderstanding me. I do not think, for instance, that any reader would gather from my book that Thorold Dickinson's *Gaslight* is "the successor to various American psychological films" (cf. p.114), or that *Strange Incident* was made between *Our Daily Bread* and *Blockade* (cf.p.106), as he implies.

I also think that when Mr. Brien claims to quote verbatim from my book he should not leave out my "the's", thereby giving the impression that the book he is reviewing is written in telegram style or baby language.

Yours faithfully,
EGON LARSEN.

ALAN BRIEN writes:

So Mr. Larsen actually "devoted three whole pages" to photography in his standard work on film-making. I can't imagine how I managed to miss them, but, unless I deliberately misunderstand him again, he is still rather proud of this lavishness. Would he regard a comprehensive handbook on the Elizabethan theatre as valuable, if it devoted three pages to the poetry?

I am sorry to have attributed to the blurb, as Mr. Larsen attributes them to Sir Michael Balcon, Mr. Larsen's own claims, but neither that nor the ownership of the fish skin eyelid affects my conclusions. "Spotlight on Films" is badly written, full of prefabricated jargon bolted stiffly together, and no amount of apostrophe s'es will save it. It is pitifully inadequate on the creative contribution of the cameraman, the editor, the designer, and the director. Such critical comments on specific films as it contains are either commonplace, traceable to the standard works, or enthusiastic or condemnatory ejaculations unsupported by any analysis or comparison. How near near-plagiarism can be is a subject for lawyers to delight in, but Mr. Larsen would have made his readers less suspicious if he had listed those familiar aids to film appreciation (Manvell, Lindgren etc.), whom he obviously has read, in his index. "I do not think any reader would gather . . ." he complains. All I can say is that this reader and many of his friends, all of them film journalists, did gather quite a selection of garbled information from "Spotlight on Films". If I hit hard in my review it was because my hopes were raised by the swollen claims of Mr. Larsen's publishers and I was correspondingly disappointed.

The Editor, SIGHT AND SOUND

Dear Sir,

The reviewer of "Spotlight on Films" refers to Mr. Larsen's remarks about "the opening shot of *Song of Ceylon*". The opening shot idea is entirely Mr. Larsen's and should be credited neither to Roger Manvell nor Graham Greene, both of whom seem to be aware that the shot in question occurs near the end of the first reel.

In the interests of accuracy may I also point out that Mr. Larsen is incorrect in saying that *Le Quatorze Juillet* was Clair's second talkie?

Yours faithfully,
BASIL WRIGHT.

SCRIPTING

The Editor, SIGHT AND SOUND

Dear Sir,

In her article on the "scripting" of *Sunset Boulevard* and *All About Eve*, Miss Penelope Houston seems to have fallen into the common error of equating the script with story and dialogue. A script, however, determines also camera movement and pictorial composition, as the sequence from Thorold Dickinson's *Mayor of Casterbridge* printed in the same issue as Miss Houston's article quite clearly shows. In these respects, the script of *All About Eve*, in spite of its witty dialogue, seems to me forbiddingly dull and even incompetent; it does not contain one memorable shot and might have been taken by a camera placed once and for all at some spot chosen at random and then left to itself.

By comparison, the script of *Sunset Boulevard* shows indeed "ingenuity and cleverness", but here it is part of the dialogue which mars the total impression. In this script all the important points are made by the juxtaposition of images; why, then, should they be underlined by a heavily worded commentary? Rats in an empty swimming-pool lose a great deal of their poignancy if some melancholy voice explains to us what they mean.

So many films now seem to be unable to dispense with a running commentary, that I wonder whether scriptwriters and directors feel no longer confident that they can tell their stories convincingly in visual terms, which is, after all, their business, or whether they hold such a low opinion of their audiences that they doubt their ability to understand what they see unless they are told what it is.

Yours faithfully,
HANS W. COHN.

PENELOPE HOUSTON writes:

Mr. Cohn's letter raises the point of where, in writing about the scripting of a film, one should draw the line. Clearly the final shooting script does determine "camera movement and pictorial composition"—it also gives some idea of how the film will be edited. It is, in fact, a blueprint, having some bearing on every aspect of the finished product, and for this reason it is almost impossible to write about "the script" in this sense without considering the film as a whole. The purpose of my articles on scripting is to attempt to isolate those elements in the film for which the writer is directly responsible—not to consider those incorporated in the shooting script in which the director (or in the case of Mr. Mankiewicz or Mr. Dickinson, the directing half of the writer-director) would naturally have a hand. If this is a limitation, it is a deliberate one and, furthermore, a necessary one, since to analyse a shooting script in such detail it is essential to be able to read it, and this is very rarely possible.

The script of *All About Eve* is clearly conceived in a manner which would be intolerably static but for the skill of dialogue and situation. It is a matter of opinion whether this is adequate to carry the film. I agree with Mr. Cohn that the spoken narrative is almost always unnecessary and tedious. In *Sunset Boulevard*, however, the narration was very much an integral part of the script and was, I think, used to supplement the images rather than to make a superfluous running commentary on them.

THE NEED FOR BRITISH FILMS

The Editor, SIGHT AND SOUND

Dear Sir,

Here is one cinema-goer who has paid many a dollar into ODEON (Canada) box-offices, a cinema-goer who will be most distressed if no more new British first features (or second) are shown in Odeon theatres, a cinema-goer, indeed, who will be so distressed that he will refrain from attending Odeon theatres at all. (And the same applies to all other cinemas!)

In the event that no more British features are shown in Canadian

cinemas (which God forbid), the filmgoing activities of this cinema-goer will be strictly confined (except in very rare and 99% European instances) to the Film Society to which he belongs.

May I say how much I enjoy reading SIGHT AND SOUND. Personally I have not been left with the impression that SIGHT AND SOUND harbours or has harboured any anti-British bias.

With regard to the J.A.R.O. reducing their own produced output of film features and shorts, I can only say, as I have told J.A.R.O., that it is little short of a tragedy on this North American continent where audiences of all kinds are just getting used to, appreciating and looking forward to more British films. In other words, the fight, entailing a terrific amount of expenditure (albeit at a loss), planning and effort, is 90% won and, with the exception of Ealing, everyone cries blue murder and throws up their hands. If only Mr. Rank's shareholders would lose just a little more in cash, they would without doubt reap the harvest from this continent that they have so courageously reached for and earned.

Yours faithfully,

C. F. RICKARD,

North Vancouver, Canada.

COMPETITION

Competition No. 11. A number of films have recently appeared based on the works of distinguished authors: you are asked to write a review (limit, 200 words) of one of the following films as the author concerned might have written it—Henry James on *The Heiress*, Rudyard Kipling on *Kim*, Goethe on *La Beauté du Diable*, Ernest Hemingway on *The Breaking Point*, the Abbé Prevost on *Manon*, Mary Webb on *Gone to Earth*, R. L. Stevenson on *Treasure Island* and James Thurber on *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*.

Usual prizes: closing date, March 30th.

Results of Competition No. 9. A large entry made it clear that readers felt strongly on the subject of film clichés, especially one or two—notably, “We can’t fight this thing, it’s bigger than both of us”—which turned up a number of times. It was a question of narrowing down the choice to the ripest and most outrageous: four entries seemed to us equally good, and are each awarded a prize of a 10/6 book token. Honourable mentions follow.

Travelogue (Commentary on girls diving against highly coloured background): “Yes, sir! Poetry in motion, indeed!”

Prisoner of war film (prisoner surveying desolate parade ground backed by barbed wire): “I was just thinking that now the heather will be in bloom in Devon”.

Film with Religious angle: “I think that God would understand, son. Why don’t you have a talk with him about it?” (Mary Hocking, 21, Lynton Road, W.3.)

“He’s not in his dressing room—he’s on in five minutes—call every bar in town—check with the police department—notify the F.B.I.—but GET HIM HERE. . . .”

“My new dress, you’ve ruined it. . . .”

“D’ya think I’m crazy? That stuff’s hotter than a firecracker. We’d have every cop in town on our trail”. (Peter Price, 2, Marlborough Studios, N.W.8.)

Western: “And who are you anyway?” “My name is—” “What, not the man who tamed Dodge City?”

Tough Romance: “Why, but you’re strong. I’ll bet you could hurt a girl if you tried”.

Sophisticated Drama: “Never laugh at me—do you hear? Whatever else you do, never laugh at me”. (Don Melvin, 22, Cromwell Road, N.3.)

Eve Arden in reel 9: “Oh, I was a smart girl! I had it all figured out. You don’t let it mean anything and you don’t get hurt. That’s what the man said on the radio!”

Suburban kitchen interior (studio): C. S. Gladys, frying Jack’s supper on gas stove. Hearing door open, she looks round. Gladys: “Hullo, dear”. M. S. Jack, as he sits down moodily, opens evening paper. Gladys’ voice: “You’re back early this evening”. M. S. Gladys, sensing something wrong she leaves the stove, wiping her hands on her apron. Gladys: “Had a bad day, dear?”

Anglo-American: Judge (to American witness), “I should be grateful if you could enlighten me as to the ah—precise significance of the appellation—ah—tough bozo. . . .” (Alberta Marlow, The Art Gallery, Wakefield.)

“We’ve fought this thing: my God, how we’ve fought it!” (F. V. Tilsley.)

Technicolor musical: “Forget about all those people out there and sing to me”. “But, Mr. Iturbi, I’m scared!” (Anthony Tighe.)

Historical film, 1914: “Anything in the paper?” “Nothing important. Some Archduke’s been assassinated”. (R.A. Newport.)

Psychological: “There’s something I have to remember from my childhood”. (Ann Jacobs.)

Crooked judge: “We’ll give ’em a fair trial and then hang ’em”. (R. F. Spiller.)

War film: First soldier, “It’s quiet around here”. Second soldier (looking round surreptitiously), “Yes—too quiet!” (John Gillett.)

Domestic tragedy: “You can’t—I won’t let you make such a sacrifice!” “Now, dear, you know HE would have wanted it this way”. (W. M. Carroll.)

(BORN YESTERDAY, continued from page 441.)

stood out as an actress able to achieve a rare combination of high comedy and genuine pathos. Billie Dawn is an extension, a filling out, of that earlier character. The voice, with its grating, twittering accent suggesting the depths of idiocy, the face, across which flash the occasional, happy glimmers of dawning intelligence, the walk, suggesting petulance, dejection or conceit, combine to create a richly comic performance. Judy Holliday may or may not be an actress of any range and depth: it is to be hoped that she is not type-cast for ever on the strength of this performance. William Holden acts as an agreeable foil, and Broderick Crawford is adequate to the more strident moments, but this is essentially a one part film.

P.H.

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